EXPLORING HOW CATHOLIC SCHOOL LEADERS USE THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

AND BENCHMARKS FOR EFFECTIVE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR

ACCREDITATION: A SINGLE CASE STUDY

by

Andrew M. Kremer

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders in a Catholic diocese in the Midwestern United States use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. Through the theoretical lens of routinized action theory, the uses of the NSBECS for accreditation and the perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement were studied. This study was guided by the central research question: How do Catholic school leaders in the Midwestern United States use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation? Data collection procedures included individual interviews, focus group interviews, relevant documents involving accreditation and the use of the NSBECS, and a participant survey. Data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a two-cycle coding approach. The first-cycle coding approach consisted of Process Coding and Value Coding. Codes were then aggregated into themes, which were analyzed in the second cycle of Pattern Coding. Major themes and subthemes, organized by the central research question and two sub questions were identified through data analysis. The major themes organized into the central research question included planning, data collection, and self-assessing. The theme identified in sub question one was influence, and the themes identified in sub question two were redundancy and differentiation. The implications of this study included the uniqueness of Catholic schools that are addressed using the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation, the inclusion of community stakeholders in accreditation, and the importance of reflection in the accreditation process.

Keywords: Accreditation, Catholic Education, National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools, Quality Assurance, School Improvement

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List of Abbreviations

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS)

National Catholic Education Association (NCEA)

National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS)

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders in the Midwestern United States use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. This chapter includes background information, the relationship of the researcher to the study and participants, the problem and purpose statements, the significance of the study, and research questions. Included in the background section are historical, social, and theoretical contexts of the phenomenon of the NSBECS. Personal motivation to conduct the study, philosophical assumptions, and research paradigm were provided in the section regarding situation to self. Definitions of terms and a summary complete the chapter.

Background

The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) are the guiding standards for Catholic K-12 schools in the United States. The NSBECS are comprised of the four domains of Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Within these four domains are 13 standards and 70 benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The NSBECS have a variety of uses in Catholic K-12 schools including but not limited to accreditation, planning, accountability, and professional development (Ozar, et al., 2019). Ozar et al. (2019) conducted a study of the NSBECS and surveyed 908 Catholic school leaders who work in the areas of diocesan school leadership, providing professional development, Catholic school finance, and accreditation. The NSBECS are used most frequently for accreditation purposes with 62.7% of the 908 surveyed Catholic school leaders indicating they use the NSBECS for accreditation in

Catholic schools. Prior to the creation of the NSBECS, there were not comprehensive standards designed to provide a framework for Catholic K-12 school accreditation that address the unique culture and mission of Catholic schools. The NSBECS are the only comprehensive set of Catholic standards used in Catholic schools (Kiely, 2019). While there are Catholic K-12 dioceses and schools in the United States that use the NSBECS as the standards that guide the schools' accreditation processes, many Catholic dioceses and schools continue to partner with third party accrediting organizations and use the standards these organizations have developed as the framework for accreditation. Within the standards of the four major United States Accrediting organizations of Cognia, The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS), The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), there are added indicators for faith-based schools or Catholic schools; these additions are not a comprehensive set of standards and benchmarks (indicators) integrated with a Catholic worldview throughout. The NSBECS offer a comprehensive and unique set of standards that are specific to Catholic K-12 schools. Exploring how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation in Catholic schools has yet to be empirically studied.

Historical Context

Accreditation has a long history in the United States. In 1905, the American Medical Association employed measures to classify medical schools; accreditation was adopted by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in 1954 (Eaton, 2015). Schools have been going through quality assurance processes long before accreditation became an official process in schools; however, the development of accreditation standards and processes streamlined quality assurance for the continuous improvement of schools. The three forms of accreditation

are the European form, which has a central control component by state ministries, the United States form, which is decentralized and has a market competition component, and the British form, which is a self-accrediting form (Wilkerson, 2016). The form developed in the United States is one in which competition affects accreditation and the standards used for accreditation. Accrediting agencies have conducted much of the research on accreditation and accreditation standards in the United States (Ramirez, 2015). Bose et al. (2017) and Eaton (2015) noted there are more than 80 third party accrediting organizations in the United States that serve K-12 educational institutions and higher educational institutions, each with their own set of standards that guide the accreditation process.

Catholic Schools

Catholic schools have a long history in the United States, dating back to the seventeenth century (Hunt, 2005). Catholic schools were originally created out of disagreements regarding religion stemming from the English, Protestant culture (Hunt, 2005). Catholic bishops first acknowledged the challenges that many Catholics faced with public schooling in the Fourth Provincial Council of Baltimore in 1840. It was then Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, attempted to gain government funding for Catholic schools. This attempt was unsuccessful (Hunt, 2005; Polka et al., 2016). Catholic schools that opened during that time were financed by local parishes, which was costly. This had an impact on the Catholic population, which was largely immigrant and poor (Hunt, 2005). It was the financial commitment of this poor, immigrant community, as well as teachers, primarily religious sisters that gave Catholic schools the finances to open (Hunt, 2005). In the third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884, the Catholic bishops of the United States required that all Catholic parishes would establish a school within two years or unless otherwise noted by the local Bishop (Hunt, 2005). The prevailing

sentiment from the United States bishops in the nineteenth century was that all Catholic children would attend a Catholic school; this goal was never realized, as less than one half of Catholic children were enrolled in Catholic schools (Hunt, 2005). In 1875, Senator James Blaine from Maine introduced an amendment, that came to be known as the Blaine Amendment, which prohibited federal funding of private schools (DeForrest, 2003). While the Blaine Amendment never passed at the federal level, many states adopted language that stemmed from this amendment. Within one year of the prosed amendment, 14 states adopted language that prevented state funding of religious, private schools, and by 1890, close to 30 states adopted similar language (DeForrest, 2003).

Catholic school enrollment in the United States, largely in elementary schools, was just over 40 thousand in 1880, and grew to just over 1.7 million by 1920 (Hunt, 2005). Catholic school enrollment continued to increase and reached its peak in 1965 at 5.6 million students; this enrollment represented 12% of all K-12 students in the United States (Hunt, 2005). Over the course of the next six years, Catholic school enrollment dropped over 1.5 million students. During the 1970's, the number of religious teaching in Catholic schools declined, and there was an increase of laity in teaching positions in Catholic schools (Hunt, 2005). In the 2004-2005 school year, Catholic school enrollment was just over 2.4 million students (Hunt, 2005). According to the National Catholic Education Association (2020), there were 1.7 million students enrolled in 6,183 Catholic schools in the 2019-2020 school year. Even though Catholic schools are the largest faith-based school system internationally (Byrne & Devine, 2018), Catholic K-12 school enrollment in the United States dropped 18% in the past ten years, which has led to 1,191 Catholic school closures in that timeframe (National Catholic Education Association, 2020).

NSBECS

The NSBECS were created in 2012 in a collaborative effort by expert practitioners from higher education, Catholic K-12 education, and clergy members (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Catholic schools use the NSBECS for a variety of purposes in schools (Ozar et al., 2019), and the NSBECS have surfaced in empirical research in the field of Catholic education since developed in 2012. Much of the research that includes the NSBECS focuses on the first domain of Catholic Identity (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). There is not current empirical research on how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS for accreditation, which helps to better understand the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement.

Social Context

There are unique aspects of Catholic schools that bind Catholic schools and Catholic educators as a community. Catholic identity is one of the key communal elements of Catholic education. Two of the characteristics that are widely used to describe Catholic identity are community and Catholic social teaching (Fuller & Johnson, 2014). Hobbie, Convey, and Schuttloffel (2013) noted the relational aspect of Catholic education as the result of faith development. Catholic identity in schools encompasses mission, catechesis and faith development for both students and staff, liturgical and communal prayer, participation in the sacraments, Catholic social teaching, and social justice that ultimately cultivates relationships between members of the Catholic school as well as the greater Catholic educational community (Ozar, Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Teachers who have a strong commitment to the mission of their school show a stronger satisfaction with the school and the community (Gleeson, O'Gorman, & O'Neill, 2018). Catholic identity is a social binding concept in Catholic education; the Catholic Identity domain of the NSBECS is comprised of uniquely Catholic standards that apply to the

greater Catholic educational community.

In addition to Catholic identity, some operational aspects of Catholic schools are systemically similar. Private Catholic schools are not taxpayer funded as are public schools. Tuition and stewardship are the primary means of Catholic school revenue which ensures future sustainability. Poole and Campos (2016) contend that marketing has become a primary concern of Catholic school leaders, as the competitive nature of education in the United States has increased. Catholic school leaders share the common concerns regarding tuition, enrollment, marketing, budgeting, and operations that will ensure future sustainability in Catholic schools. The NSBECS domain of Operational Vitality contains standards and benchmarks that address these components of Catholic school operations.

Theoretical Context

The theory used to guide this study was routinized action theory developed by March and Simon (1958). March and Simon (1958) explain through routinized action theory that changes occur in organizations and institutions through multiple iterations of normal routines. Accreditation has become normal as a routine for schools in the United States. Schools conduct accreditation reviews as frequent as two to three years apart (Eaton, 2015). Enomoto and Conley (2015) highlighted that the accreditation process itself is a routine action that can allow schools to inspect the normal processes and routines that can lead to school improvement. Expanding on March and Simon's (1958) work on routinized action theory, Feldman (2000) studied the different outcomes of routines and theorized that there are three different outcomes: repairing routines when the desired result is not present, expanding routines to enhance the potential for additional improvement, and striving to improve routines to continue to improve on a consistent basis.

Situation to Self

Philosophical assumptions are beliefs that are at the core of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). "They are beliefs about ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, pp. 19-20). Given my adoption of a qualitative research design, I hold the ontological assumption that there are multiple realities as well as hold the rhetorical assumption common in qualitative research of the use of a first-person perspective. Accreditation is a reality in education and using the NSBECS as standards that guide the systemic accreditation process presents realities for Catholic K-12 educational leaders. In addition, accreditation processes, including multiple iterations of accreditation processes, present a different reality for individual Catholic school leaders. My aim was to explore those realities using multiple forms of evidence through the lens of routinized action theory and to report realities through themes that emerged in my findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research paradigm that guided this study was constructivism. Through the constructivist paradigm, I sought to understand the realities of how the participants use the NSBECS for accreditation and the type of culture that this creates in overall school improvement within a Catholic K-12 environment. As Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, in the constructivist paradigm, the researcher will acknowledge the impact that their own background has on their study.

From an axiological perspective, I recognize that the experiences that I have had with accreditation and using the NSBECS have created certain values and biases. As an associate superintendent in a Catholic diocese, I have experienced using the NSBECS for aspects of accreditation in my home diocese. My experiences using the NSBECS have been on local school

accreditation visits. These visits are conducted at local schools and the accreditation processes are designed by myself and the superintendent; however, the NSBECS are not the standards that have guided the systemic accreditation efforts of my diocese. The Office of Catholic Schools in my diocese has partnered with a third-party accrediting agency for systemic accreditation. I have often thought of exploring the concept of using the NSBECS as the standards for systemic accreditation in my diocese.

One of the issues that arises in case study research is that the procedures used by researchers do not "protect sufficiently against biases" (p. 267) and that researchers "find what she or he had set out to find" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 267). My aim was to explore the knowledge of Catholic school leaders through their own subjective experiences. This was the epistemological assumption in this study. I wanted to get close to the participants in their field to explore their knowledge of accreditation using the NSBECS. With each iteration of using the NSBECS for accreditation, the knowledge of the participants grows. From an epistemological perspective, my goal was to get close to the participants through individual interviews, focus group interviews, and documentation to understand their knowledge and subjective experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018) of how they use the NBECS for accreditation and how they perceive the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement.

Problem Statement

Accreditation is one of the primary means for determining programs and processes for improvement and growth in schools (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018). Different agencies and institutions offer their own unique sets of accreditation standards designed for school improvement. While some of the accreditation standards are applicable to schools in general, there are key differences that are critical to the success of Catholic K-12 schools, including

operational, leadership, governance aspects (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013) and Catholic identity (Hagan & Houchens, 2017; Maney, King, & Kiely, 2017). The NSBECS address these differences in the four domains of Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. Ozar et al. (2019) found that 62.7% of the 908 respondents in their survey use the NSBECS for accreditation. If almost two-thirds of Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS in some form for accreditation, it is important to study how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation in their schools to discover if they perceive the NSBECS as influential in Catholic school growth and improvement.

Catholic school leaders are using the NSBECS for accreditation efforts; however, exploring how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS for accreditation has not been empirically studied. Catholic identity is a catalyst for strengthening relationships between teachers and students in Catholic schools (Maney et al., 2017; Mayotte, 2013). These relationships help to increase student motivation and engagement, which leads to increases in student learning (Maney et al., 2017). School growth and improvement standards that encompass and integrate the Catholic faith and Gospel values could increase the Catholic identity within the school and further the growth and improvement of a Catholic school environment. The problem is that the NSBECS are being used for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools, yet there is not an understanding as to how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS for accreditation and the perceived influence of the NSBECS on school improvement in the unique setting of Catholic K-12 schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders in a Catholic diocese in the Midwestern United States use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. For this study, the NSBECS are defined as school improvement criteria that provide Catholic school specific guidelines that aid in the accreditation process in Catholic K-12 schools (Ozar, et al., 2019). The theory that guided this study was routinized action theory, developed by March and Simon (1958). March and Simon (1958) explain through routinized action theory how institutions change and develop through multiple iterations of normal routines. Accreditation is a normal routine occurring in education that is designed to bring about school growth and continuous improvement.

Significance of the Study

This study aimed to explore how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. This study may provide knowledge to Catholic K-12 school leaders that could affect their choice of accreditation standards and processes, as well as validate their use of the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in their Catholic school(s). There are Catholic schools in the United States that use third party accrediting agencies for accreditation. These agencies offer various standards that are predominantly secular in nature and are not integrated with a Catholic component throughout the standards. Understanding how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS and their perceptions of how the NSBECS influence continuous improvement could provide other Catholic school leaders perspective in their use of the NSBECS as well as their choice of the standards they use for accreditation in their schools.

Theoretical

The theoretical framework that guided this study was routinized action theory (March & Simon, 1958), which posits that institutions change and develop through multiple iterations of normal routines. The theoretical significance of this study may help to further explain the theory of routinized action theory. Accreditation is a normal routine for schools, and through the process of accreditation, school personnel self-assess routines and procedures against the set of standards that are guiding the school's accreditation (Eaton, 2015). The process of accreditation is to evaluate and learn from those routines and procedures for continuous improvement. As March and Simon (1958) explained, through multiple iterations of normal routines, positive change and growth can occur within organizations. This study may help Catholic K-12 school leaders and diocesan school leaders better understand the changes, developments, and growth that could occur from using the NSBECS in multiple iterations of accreditation efforts.

Empirical

Given the novel nature of the NSBECS, there is not empirical research on how they are being used for accreditation and school improvement efforts. The NSBECS are an effective tool for Catholic school leaders (Ozar et al., 2019); however, research specific to the use of the NSBECS for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools has not yet been conducted. This study could provide Catholic educators and leaders empirical data on how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS for accreditation in Catholic schools as well as perceptions of Catholic school leaders on the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement efforts.

Practical

Catholic schools around the United States engage in quality assurance processes through accreditation each year. Catholic schools around the country are using different sets of standards for accreditation. Many of these sets of standards do not have the same focus on Catholic identity

or culture that is unique to Catholic schools, whereas the NSBECS maintain that specific focus throughout the entirety of the standards (Ozar et al., 2019). Based on the mission of the Catholic Church, Catholic schools must have a strong Catholic identity (Hagan & Houchens, 2017), as Catholic identity is one of the key factors that leads to a high performing Catholic school (Crook & Turkington, 2018). Catholic school leaders consider their Catholic culture when seeking school improvement through quality assurance processes. The practical significance of this study is that Catholic school leaders can better understand the perceived influence and practical applications of the NSBECS as guiding standards for Catholic K-12 school accreditation and school improvement that address the uniqueness of Catholic schools. In addition, Catholic school leaders could further collaborate and learn from one another using common accreditation standards (Leatherwood, 2019).

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as guiding standards for Catholic K-12 schools' accreditation efforts to inform school improvement processes. The theoretical framework that guided this study was routinized action theory developed by March and Simon (1958). Routinized action theory explains the change that occurs through multiple iterations of normal routines. Accreditation efforts are normal routines in schools, and through the process of accreditation, schools assess the routines and processes that occur.

Central Research Question

How do Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier (pseudonym) use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation?

Many Catholic schools in the United States use the NSBECS as the sole guiding standards for accreditation. Ozar et al. (2019) surveyed Catholic school leaders in the United States and found that 62.7% of the respondents in the survey use the NSBECS for accreditation. The NSBECS provide standards that address similarities that are consistent across Catholic schools and still allow Catholic school leaders to address the unique aspects of their Catholic communities (Fortier, 2019). School improvement can happen in many ways, and accreditation is one of the main areas to ensure quality assurance in schools (Can, 2016). The central research question of this study was designed to explore how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS in the real-world context of accreditation and school improvement within Catholic schools. This can inform how Catholic school leaders describe their perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement in Catholic K-12 schools.

Sub-Question 1

How do Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

The NSBECS are comprised of the four domains of Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Sub-question one is designed to garner the perceptions of Catholic school leaders of the influence of these four domains on school growth and improvement. Through their experiences and use of the NSBECS in accreditation, Catholic school leaders have an applicable lens through which to view the influence of the domains of the NSBECS.

Sub-Question 2

How, if at all, can the NSBECS be improved to further influence overall school growth and improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

Sub-question two was designed to gather the perceptions of Catholic school leaders on how the NSBECS could be improved to enhance the four domains of Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality. These four domains address the uniqueness of Catholic schools (Fortier, 2019). Given their experiences and use of the NSBECS with accreditation efforts, participants have a good understanding of the NSBECS and perceptions on how the NSBECS impact their schools. This lens allowed them to provide their opinions on how the NSBECS could be improved to have greater efficacy for school improvement.

Definitions

Terms applicable to this study are as follows:

1. *Accreditation* – The encouragement and promotion of school improvement that leads to an excellent education for students (Enomoto & Conley, 2015).

2. *Diocese* – A "particular Church" (Can. 368) of which a bishop or other prelate has authority (Brown, 2010).

3. *NSBECS* – A guide and assessment tool for effectiveness, improvement, and sustainability in Catholic K-12 schools (Ozar et al., 2019).

4. *Parish School* – An autonomous school that is under the authority of the pastor of the parish (Huchting et al., 2017).

5. *School Effectiveness* – The study of the process of change that balances culture and performance (Ozar, Barton, & Calteaux, 2015).

6. *Routinized Action Theory* – The theory that posits organizations change through multiple iterations of normal routines (March & Simon, 1958).

Summary

Accreditation is one of the main ways that schools provide assurances of the quality of the educational environment and culture of the school. There are many different standards that provide the framework for accreditation in K-12 schools, including Catholic K-12 schools. However, Catholic schools have unique qualities and cultures that revolve around Catholic identity and the operations of the schools. The NSBECS provide standards and benchmarks that address the importance of Catholic identity, as well as the importance of operational vitality as a means for school improvement. Accreditation is a way for schools to improve their processes, routines, programs, and academic quality to ensure an excellent education for students (Enomoto & Conley, 2015). The problem is that the NSBECS have not been empirically studied as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders in a diocese in the Midwestern United States use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A review of the literature was conducted regarding school effectiveness, school improvement, accreditation, accreditation in K-12 schools, accreditation standards and the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS). While the lens of accreditation is the purpose of reviewing the literature on the NSBECS, other areas of implementation and use were reviewed to discover the influence of the NSBECS as a guiding set of standards in Catholic schools as well as to discover the unique aspects of Catholic schools. This chapter begins with the theoretical framework of routinized action theory. Following the theoretical framework is the review of related literature. The review of the literature is focused on school effectiveness, general accreditation and quality assurance, school improvement, accreditation standards, and the NSBECS. A review of the literature reveals the need of a study of how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic schools, as well as their perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement in Catholic K-12 schools.

Theoretical Framework

March and Simon (1958) explained, through routinized action theory, how organizations can change through continued iterations of what might seem as normal routines. Within organizations, members experience stimuli that "evoke response or actions" (March & Simon, 1958, p. 54). These stimuli often surface through the normal routines that occur within organizations, and one stimulus can bring about more than one response or action (March & Simon, 1958). While stimuli may bring about action within members of organizations, March and Simon (1958) explained that inaction is a possible response as well. Taking action or "doing

nothing" (p. 196) in response to stimuli is a behavior that members of organizations could display. March and Simon (1958) explained a model when members of organizations take action or respond to stimuli. A program is meant to meet certain criteria, and this occurs through change over time. When the criteria are not met, new programs will be developed. Changes in programs or activities are through addition or adjusting programs already in place (March & Simon, 1958). These programs are adjusted or developed based upon the change that is needed in the organization, and this change is found through the evaluation of the normal routines that occur within the organization.

Daily occurrences in organizations are part of consistent patterns of behavior (Enomoto & Conley, 2014). While occurrences that are routine may initially be consistent, unchanging, and maintaining the status quo, it is through the intricacies of the routines in which change occurs (Enomoto & Conley, 2014; Feldman, 2000; Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Individuals who are involved in the routines reflect on and react to the routines which could result in changes (March & Simon, 1958; Feldman, 2000). With each iteration of routines, reflection occurs and there is the potential for changes in routines that lead to improvement, as well as the potential for systemic organizational change. There are three outcomes that stem from continuous change: there are those that do not live up to expectations, those that offer new ways of doing things, and when the desired result is attained, the outcome does not match the ideals or values of the organization (Feldman, 2000). While there are outcomes that stem from the normal routines that occur in organizations, there are also ways that routines hinder the change process. Adler, Goldoftas, and Levine (1999) explained that major routines designed to implement change are known as metaroutines and cause organizational "rigidity" (p. 46). This organizational rigidity causes members of the organization to resist the change that could occur through major routines.

Enomoto and Conley (2014) studied school accreditation and school improvement through the lens of routinized action theory. Routines are a normal process in schools; school personnel changes over time, yet the routines within schools continue as part of normal operating procedures (Enomoto & Conley, 2014). This is an important part of the accreditation process, as Askell-Williams and Koh (2020) found that issues arise in schools when programs and initiatives are not sustained over time. It is the normal routines that occur in schools that allow for consistency in routines and continued operations though school personnel may change (Enomoto & Conley, 2014). The consistency and normalcy of these routines could lead to the behavior of inaction. Through this inaction, change is unlikely to occur; however, through close evaluation and examination of routines, school personnel can implement change (Enomoto & Conley, 2014).

Part of the accreditation process for schools is to assess routines alongside standards that are designed to help schools improve. The assessment of these normal routines is when change could occur in schools. The accreditation process itself is a routine for educational institutions; "schools should become learning organizations in which school personnel are engaged in continuous cycles of action" (Anderson & Kumari, 2008), and as part of this process, school personnel conduct a school self-assessment and then have an external visit from professional educators who represent accrediting agencies (Enomoto & Conley, 2014; Bose et al., 2017). Through preparation for the accreditation visit, school personnel review documents, collect data, and survey stakeholders. Schools review their routines against the set of standards determined by the accrediting agency (Bose et al., 2017). Through multiple iterations of the routine of accreditation, educational institutions may create and implement institutional change.

It is common for K-12 schools to go through the external visit process after a specified number of years as determined by the accrediting agency. Through each iteration of the accreditation visit process, the volunteers who represent the accrediting agencies change; these changes in visiting personnel who have different perspectives can influence the change process in the routine of accreditation visits. Feldman (2000) indicated that routines are influenced by both change in jobs and change in personnel. According to Enomoto and Conley (2014), accreditation is a routinized process that is aimed at school improvement that occurs every 1-6 years. Schools will follow similar routines each time they go through the accreditation process; reflections and reactions to the normal school routines create the potential for change in future iterations. Accreditation is a way for school leaders to provide the close examination and assessment of routines that encourages change rather than supports the status quo (Enomoto & Conley, 2014). This is the purpose of exploring how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation in K-12 Catholic schools through the lens of routinized action theory. Exploring how Catholic school leaders use of the NSBECS provides insight into the perceived influence of the NSBECS for positive changes in school improvement and changes within the organization. This study could advance routinized action theory by examining the change that occurs in Catholic K-12 schools through multiple iterations of using the NSBECS as the standards for accreditation routines.

Related Literature

Accreditation is present in the field of education to ensure quality assurance and school effectiveness (Head & Johnson, 2011; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018). Accreditation is often seen in research as a pathway for school improvement. While school improvement does not always lead to school effectiveness, effective schools are ones that seek improvement continuously.

Empirical research on school effectiveness revolves around student learning and effective teaching (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018; Volkwein, 2010), as well as school culture (Ozar et al., 2019). Additionally, important to the study of accreditation is the research regarding accreditation standards. Research of the efficacy of the NSBECS is important to the study of accreditation in K-12 Catholic schools.

School Effectiveness

School effectiveness research has gone through several phases (Reynolds et al., 2014). While research has supported that there are many factors that contribute to the effectiveness of schools, the research on school effectiveness began with the idea that schools had little to no effect on student learning and outcomes (Ozar et al., 2015; Reynolds et al., 2014). In the second phase of school effectiveness research, longitudinal outcomes became the focus, and the third phase of research was focused on why schools had different effects on outcomes. School effectiveness is a continuous process and requires ongoing, longitudinal study (Kyriakides & Creemers, 2008). One of the primary ways that schools are judged on overall school effectiveness is student learning (Downey, Hippel, & Hughes, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2014); student learning and academic growth are critical to overall school effectiveness (Makhoul, 2019; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018; Volkwein, 2010). In addition to student learning, other factors that have historically been used to evaluate school effectiveness include achievement and covariate adjustments (outside of school factors) (Downey et al., 2008). Research evaluating school effectiveness in achievement has been widely based on student outcomes in language and mathematics, and that new research shows that student learning outcomes should be measured using a wider scope of behaviors and skills (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2006; Downey et al., 2008).

School effectiveness has typically been evaluated in three ways, which include achievement, learning, and covariate adjustments. (Downey et al., 2008; Ozar et al., 2015).

Achievement is one of the most common ways that school effectiveness has been and continues to be evaluated (Marks, 2018; Ozar et al., 2015). Additionally, the most common way of assessing achievement in schools is state required common student assessments, and federal funding is often tied to these assessments (Downey et al., 2008). Reynolds et al. (2014) explained that learning outcomes relate to both academic and social development in students. Factors that contribute to student learning include "teaching methods, the organization – formally and informally – of schools, the curriculum, the role of leadership, and the effects of education learning environments in general" (Reynolds et al., 2014, p. 197). In addition to these factors, teacher caring has been associated with school effectiveness (Ramberg et al., 2019). Ramberg et al. (2019) studied the relationship between school effectiveness and teacher caring and teachers' perceptions of the organizational aspects of leadership, teacher cooperation, and school ethos. Ramberg et al. (2019) found that it is not just important to focus on school effectiveness measures in accordance with student demographics and learning, but also to study effectiveness measures based upon teachers' evaluation of organizational aspects of the school, such as leadership, teacher cooperation, and school ethos. These organizational aspects are associated with student perceptions of teacher caring (Ramberg et al., 2019), which factors into overall school effectiveness.

According to Downey et al. (2008), another form of assessment of the effectiveness of schools is learning. Schools develop ways in which they measure student learning through a value-added approach (Marks, 2018; Ozar et al., 2015). According to Ozar et al. (2015), a value-added approach to gauge student learning occurs using formulas that "look at student growth by

analyzing students' average testing gains over the entire year" (p. 10). This approach has led to input on teacher pay and teacher evaluation programs within schools (Ozar et al., 2015).

A third way in which school effectiveness is measured is using statistical covariate adjustments, which comprises of the external (outside of school) factors that contribute to student learning and achievement (Downey et al., 2008). These factors include poverty, race and ethnicity, and other family factors (Ozar et al., 2015).

School Culture

Ozar et al. (2015) described school effectiveness as the study of the process of change that balances culture and performance. Research in the field of education has a long history that indicates the importance of culture as one of the predominant variables in school improvement and school processes (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000; Louis & Lee, 2016). School culture is the common beliefs and values that permeate through the members of the school (Ali, 2017; Van Houtte, 2005). Educational leaders are often considered the drivers of the culture of a given school (Ali, 2017). Bellei et al. (2019) studied sustainability of school effectiveness and pointed out that school culture is critical to longevity in effectiveness of schools. School leadership and teachers are active participants and work hard to "cultivate" (p. 281) the culture of schools. This culture was based on academic achievement and the important values of the school (Bellei et al., 2019). Schools that show longevity and sustainability in overall effectiveness are those that protect, among other factors, the culture of the school (Bellei et al., 2019). School culture could impact school effectiveness as the culture may influence the behavior of the individuals within the school (Houtte, 2005). As Ramberg et al. (2019) noted, teacher caring is associated with increased student learning and overall school effectiveness. Teacher caring could be attributed to

a cultural aspect of school environments. The culture of the school is an important aspect to consider when looking at the effectiveness of schools (Van Houtte, 2005).

Catholic school leaders "shape the school community's culture in ways that assist in faith formation" (Schuttloffel, 2013, p. 81); therefore, it is important that Catholic school principals have both the necessary skills as academic leaders as well as spiritual leaders (Holter & Frabutt, 2013; Morten & Lawler, 2016). Hagan and Houchens (2017) contended that one of the primary ways Catholic school leaders display leadership and develop faith in the faculty and staff of Catholic schools is through faculty meetings. Trust is an important component in the faculty meetings (Hagan & Houchens, 2017) and is also an important component in school culture and overall school effectiveness (Louis & Lee, 2016).

In the area of school effectiveness, there are various needs for future study. One such need is the study of outcomes of school effectiveness that go beyond academic achievement (Leonard et al., 2004; Reynolds et al., 2014). There are numerous quantitative studies of school effectiveness; however, there is a need to explore the relationships that are involved through qualitative research methods (Reynolds et al., 2014). The need for additional outcomes, such as student social and affective outcomes would be greatly benefitted through qualitative research studies that explore relationships (Reynolds et al., 2014).

Continuous Improvement

While continuous improvement in schools can provide greater overall school effectiveness, Ozar et al. (2015) contend that school improvement research differs from school effectiveness research as criteria for school improvement research is designed around improvement, which is a formative process, while school effectiveness research criteria is designed around the measurement of effectiveness, which is a summative process. The

Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2004) outlines different criteria that aid in systemic institutional effectiveness with the main goal of continuous improvement. Research on continuous improvement in schools indicates the importance of improvement of the entire school (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2004). Within the criteria outlined by the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (2004) is that of internal effectiveness, which entails setting goals for short and long-term effectiveness. To ensure maximum effort and motivation to achieve the goals of school effectiveness, these goals should be both challenging and specific (Locke & Latham, 1990).

The school improvement process "should be a balance between strengthening patterns of accountability and the development of a framework to enact the improvement process" (Leonard et al., 2004, p.7). School improvement involves multiple initiatives occurring concurrently (D'Agostino & Kowalski, 2018). A school self-evaluation framework is a way that schools can identify important aspects needed for future improvement (Antoniou, Myburgh-Louw, & Gronn, 2016). According to Antoniou et al. (2016), school self-evaluation "could be described as an ongoing quest for evidence in a school's transparent sense of purpose, behavior, relationships, and classroom performance" (p. 192). Accreditation processes are ways that school leaders identify needs and goals for continuous improvement (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018), which in many cases begins with a self-evaluation (Bowker, 2016). Accreditation standards, like a self-evaluation framework, that identifies the school's purpose, behaviors, and relationships are critical to specific improvement processes that are unique to schools. Accrediting agencies, which develop the standards for accreditation, "encourage and promote school improvement" (Enomoto & Conley, 2014, p. 80).

Accreditation

Accreditation is one of the most effective avenues to determine quality assurance and organizational effectiveness (Brittingham, O'Brien, & Alig, 2008; Lejeune, 2011; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018). Accreditation in the United States involves external accrediting agencies (accreditors), which are private organizations that "develop evaluation criteria and conduct peer evaluations to assess whether or not those criteria are met" (US Department of Education, 2020). The United States Department of Education does not accredit individual educational institutions and is not involved in accreditation processes (US Department of Education, 2020). For this reason, many local states implement accreditation criteria for schools, and schools are left to partnering with accrediting agencies for their accreditation efforts. The evaluation of institutions and programs through accreditation processes provide public accountability to the program offerings by schools (Shawer, 2013). There are two main avenues for accreditation in K-12 schools. The first is a specialized accreditation, which is the evaluation of a specified program or initiative, and the second is regional, or institutional, accreditation, which is a systemic accreditation of the entire institution (Makhoul, 2019; US Department of Education, 2020).

According to the US Department of Education (2020), accreditation processes involve standards, self-study, on-site evaluation, decision and publication, monitoring, and reevaluation. The accrediting agency develops and implements the standards that are set forth for the accreditation process; in some cases, the accrediting agency works with the educational institution to develop the standards (US Department of Education, 2020). The self-study is when the educational institution self-evaluates in accordance with the standards developed by the accrediting agency. The on-site evaluation involves a team of peers that evaluates the programs of the institution, or the institution itself, against the set of standards (US Department of Education, 2020). After the self-study and the on-site evaluation, a decision on accreditation is

determined by the accrediting agency and monitoring takes place. After a specified amount of time, the accreditation status of the educational institution is reevaluated (US Department of Education, 2020). Through the monitoring and reevaluation of accreditation status, educational institutions go through additional iterations of evaluating and assessing routines. Through the continued assessment of routines, organizational change may occur.

Much of the empirical research on accreditation is at the higher education level seeking to determine the effectiveness of colleges and universities against a set of standards. Accrediting agencies are guided by their ability to improve the education that is provided by institutions of higher education (Cura & Alani, 2018; Makhoul, 2019). According to the US Department of Education (2020), higher education institutions are given a high degree of autonomy in how they operate, which includes their program offerings and accreditation processes. State accreditation policies and protocols could create this same autonomy for K-12 educational institutions depending on the local State Education Agency (SEA) and local state statues.

Quality assurance processes lead to high quality teaching and learning and can additionally incite changes in the culture of the institution (Tavares et al., 2016). High quality teaching and learning and organizational changes for the better could help schools in accountability measures. After the inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, almost all states within the United States developed an accountability system that generates report cards for individual schools (Deming & Figlio, 2016; Niemeyer et al., 2016). This process has continued with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as states are still required to assign accountability grades to schools; in addition, ESSA states that students must be taught to higher standards, including college and career readiness standards (Bae, 2018; US Department of Education, 2020). These report cards note summative assessment scores and additional

information that indicates the overall performance of the school (Deming & Figlio, 2016).

Accreditation efforts that lead to greater school improvement and growth may surface through

state accountability measures.

Accreditation efforts that result in the use of common resources could lead to similarities

within educational institutions (Cheng, 2015). This, along with competition of higher educational

institutions, could lead to both the use of similar resources and like accreditation experiences,

which creates *isomorphism* (Cheng, 2015). Isomorphism is when organizations "become

increasingly similar during the change process" (Cheng, 2015, p. 1029). DiMaggio and Powell

(1983) identified that one reason that isomorphism surfaces is "because organizational decision

makers learn appropriate responses and adjust their behavior accordingly" (p. 149). Isomorphism

could occur through accreditation efforts (Cheng, 2015; Lejeune & Vas, 2009). Educational

institutional leaders experience isomorphism when they learn the appropriate response and

compliance to accreditation and accreditation standards. That response does not always align

with the mission and vision of the educational institution and could hinder the improvement and

growth processes (Cheng, 2015), which is one of the intended outcomes of accreditation

(Enomoto & Conley, 2014; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018).

K-12 Accreditation

According to the Education Commission of the States (2014), twenty-six states in the

United States have a requirement of public schools for an accreditation process. Of those twenty-

six states, six of the states use regional or national accrediting agencies (Education Commission

of the States, 2014). According to Enomoto and Conley (2014), secondary schools in most states

are required by either the state or the local school district to undergo some form of accreditation

through a partnership with a nationally or regionally recognized third party organization. There

are more than eighty third party accrediting organizations in the United States (Bose et al., 2017; Eaton, 2015); however, Oldham (2018) noted the four major accrediting agencies in the United States are AdvancED, the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools (MSACS), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). AdvancED has since merged with another non-profit organization, Measured Progress, and changed the corporate name to Cognia in August of 2019 (Cognia, 2019). The purpose of accreditation in K-12 schools is to ensure quality assurance as well as aid in the continuous improvement process (Oldham, 2018; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018; Wilkerson, 2017).

Makhoul (2019) studied the impact of the accreditation process in higher education on teaching and learning and found that there is a disconnect between accreditation process and teachers' understanding of how these processes impact teaching and learning. It is the standards by which accrediting agencies gauge effectiveness of institutions that can provide clarity to this disconnect; however, Makhoul (2019) found that within some accrediting agencies there is an absence of standards that evaluate achievement. In contrast with the findings from Makhoul (2019), Tavares, Sin, Videira, and Amaral (2016) found that quality assurance, which are forms of accreditation processes that are coupled with reflection, can positively affect teaching and learning. It is the reflections that occur after iterations of routines that allow for change and growth to happen (March & Simon, 1958). The accreditation process involves monitoring and reevaluating educational institutions, which creates additional reflections through increased iterations of routines. The empirical research on K-12 accreditation is sparse and given the recency in the development of the NSBECS, there is not empirical research regarding how

Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in K-12 Catholic schools.

Accreditation Standards

Standards are an important aspect of ensuring quality assurance in educational institutions through the accreditation process. Can (2016) conducted a study on accreditation standards in distance education and recognized the importance of standards and a lack of empirical research on the subject. According to Eaton (2015), accreditation structure in the United States is "decentralized and complex, mirroring the decentralization and complexity of American higher education" (p. 1). Wilkerson (2017) additionally acknowledged the decentralization of accreditation processes in the United States. Empirical research indicates the high number of accrediting agencies and differences in standards among the different agencies. There is also a connection between national and international accrediting standards including both similarities and differences among the standards (Wilkerson, 2017). As part of a study of both national and international standards, Wilkerson (2017) suggested finding themes within the standards when seeking multiple accreditations. Common themes identified in the study were student achievement and continuous improvement; curriculum; faculty; facilities, equipment and supplies; administrative and fiscal capacity; and student information, admissions and support services (Wilkerson, 2017). The common themes that emerge from the standards are the important concepts for schools seeking accreditation. This is evidenced through the adoption of standards by accrediting agencies that have included student learning (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018). In addition to student learning, accreditation standards are important in the evaluation of leadership performance, as deviations can occur when leadership is not evaluated in accordance with effective standards (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Torsak et al., 2019).

Four Major Accrediting Agency Accreditation Standards. The four major accrediting agencies in the United States are Cognia (formerly AdvancED), the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Each of these four major accreditors has standards and indicators developed that are the framework of accreditation for K-12 schools (Cognia, 2020; Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020; New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020; Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Each of these four major accreditors provides different terminology for the standards they present. The terms domain, standards, and indicators will be used in the following description as used by the accrediting agencies.

Cognia Standards. Cognia partners with schools and school systems globally for accreditation processes and has been accrediting schools since 1895 (Cognia, 2020). Cognia reviews and revises accreditation standards every five years; the next cycle of accreditation standards will be released in 2021and take effect for schools and school systems in the 2022-2023 school year. The current Cognia standards are organized into the three domains of Leadership Capacity, Learning Capacity, and Resource Capacity. Within those three domains are 31 standards (Cognia, 2020). The 11 standards in the Leadership Capacity domain address various elements of school and educational leadership including institution purpose, stakeholder involvement, governing authority establishment and implementation of policies, leader practices and engagement of stakeholders to support the school system, and collecting and analyzing data (Cognia, 2020). The Learning Capacity domain consists of 12 standards focused on opportunities for learners to advance their creativity and problem-solving skills, a culture of learning, a structure focused on learners, processes, instruction, and the use of both formative and

summative data that lead to student learning (Cognia, 2020). The Resource Capacity domain is designed to align institutional processes that support learning and instruction within the system or institution (Cognia, 2020). The Resource Capacity domain consists of eight standards that address professional development and learning structure, teacher mentoring and coaching, hiring and retaining highly qualified educational staff, the use of digital resources and technology in teaching and learning practices, resources to support the institution's curriculum, long range planning, and human and fiscal resources (Cognia, 2020).

   The Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Standards. The MSACS standards "serve as a mechanism for improving a school's capacity to produce the levels of student performance that are both desired and expected by its community of stakeholders" (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020, p.1). Accreditation standards are the primary catalyst for decision making processes of accreditation for the MSACS; however, there is flexibility within the standards to meet the different needs of educational institutions (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The MSACS has standards that apply to all schools that are accredited through the organization, as well as standards added to address non-public and faith-based schools. The MSACS standards are organized into 12 standards and 293 indicators within those 12 standards. The indicators *amplify* the standards and are ways that educational institutions can show that they are meeting the standards (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The 12 standards consist of Mission, Governance and Leadership, School Improvement Planning, Finances, Facilities, School Organization and Staff, Health and Safety, Educational Program, Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning, Student Services, Student Life and Student Activities, and Information Resources (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020).

The Mission standard relates to the vision and a mission statement that is aligned with the values and norms of the community and consists of six indicators, two of which address faith-based institutions. These indicators are related to the integration of religious identity into the school and the visibility of religious symbols and artifacts within the school (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The Governance and Leadership standard addresses compliance with civil authorities and the governing and leadership aspects of the institution, including communication, adherence to mission, and strategic planning. The Governance and Leadership standard consists of 39 indicators, including 10 indicators for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The School Improvement Planning standard gauges the institution's plans to deliver and grow student performance. This standard has eight indicators, one of which is for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The Finances standard addresses the financial resources of the educational institution and includes 17 indicators. Two of the indicators are designed to meet the needs of faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). There are 14 indicators in the Facilities standard, which is designed to ensure that the institution has processes to maintain a safe and clean facility to ensure achievement of the mission; there are three indicators that are for schools that have early childhood programs (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The School Organization and Staff standard addresses key components of having administrative, instructional, and support staffs that aid the institution in the delivery of the educational program in accordance with the mission. There are 37 indicators, including two for schools with early childhood programs, two for schools that have distance learning, and eight for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020).

There are 18 indicators in the Health and Safety standard, which is designed to ensure the institution is abiding by civil statues to protect the health and safety of the students, staff, and visitors of the school. Of the 18 indicators, one is for schools that have boarding as an option for enrollment and three are for those institutions that have early childhood programs (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The eighth standard is the Educational Program, which is standard with the highest number of indicators of all the standards for the MSACS. The Educational Program standard addresses all programming for the institution including programs, curriculum, content and learning standards, instructional methods, and assessments (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). There are 61 indicators in this standard with 21 indicators intended for schools with early childhood programs, five indicators intended for schools with elementary programs, two indicators for schools with middle school programs, three with schools that have secondary programs, six indicators for schools with distance programs, and 10 indicators for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). There are 25 indicators in the Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning standard. This standard offers indicators that ensure that the school assesses student learning and performance that is based on research and best practices. Of the 25 indicators, two are for schools with early childhood programs, four are for schools that offer distance learning, and one is for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The Student Services standard relates to the services that the school offers that support the learning of all students. In this standard, there are 34 indicators, four of which are for schools with distance learning and four for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 2020). The Student Life and Student Activities standard supports non-discriminatory programs and processes that aid in the overall wellness of students. Within the 19 indicators in this

standard, four indicators are for schools that offer boarding, two for schools with distance

programs, and one for faith-based schools (Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools,

2020). There are 15 indicators in the Information Resources standard. This standard addresses

the school's resources, including personnel. These resources should support overall student

learning and the delivery of the education within the school. Of the 15 standards, three are for

schools with early childhood programs and three are for schools with distance learning options.

Western Association of Schools and Colleges Standards. The WASC accreditation

standards are in four categories. The four categories consist of Organization for Student

Learning; Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Support for Student Personal and Academic

Growth; and Resource Management and Development. Within these categories lie 14 criteria

that schools must address to have full accreditation status, along with an accompanying rubric

identifying how schools receive initial and full accreditation status or are in candidacy for

accreditation (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). In the Organization for

Student Learning Category, there are seven criteria: School Purpose, Governance, School

Leadership, Staff, School Environment, Reporting Student Progress, and School Improvement

Process (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The School Purpose criterion relates to a clear vision and mission (the purpose) for the

educational institution. In this criterion, communication, stakeholder understanding and

commitment, and processes for review are aspects of the rubric as to how the institution will be

evaluated (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Areas of the rubric within the

Governance criterion include a formal governing body that has policies that align with the

mission of the institution and the collaboration with staff from the institution in the

implementation of the policies. In addition, communication of the responsibilities and purpose of

the board is present to institutional stakeholders (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The School Leadership criterion addresses administrative leadership aspects of the school including operational processes, decision-making, working with staff members of the school, and development and implementation of school-wide policies (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Employment and training of highly qualified staff is present in the Staff criterion. This includes policies, evaluation processes, and professional development practices and a commitment from staff to the purpose and mission of the institution (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The School Environment criterion consists of elements of a safe and healthy environment for staff and students. This criterion includes a facility that supports the learning for all students, a respect within the community for the differences that exist within the school, safety policies and procedures, and the communication to stakeholders regarding the safe and healthy environment (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Reporting Student Progress criterion addresses assessing student progress and growth toward identified outcomes. Open communication between school personnel and students and parents is an important element in this criterion (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The School Improvement Process criterion consists of leadership understanding and efforts toward overall school improvement. This includes the development of school improvement plans, monitoring those plans, using resources to aid in the process, and stakeholder involvement in school improvement (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

In the second category of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, there are three criteria in the rubric standards for the WASC. The criteria are What Students Learn, How Students Learn, and How Assessment is Used (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The What Students Learn criterion addresses the curriculum and expectations for learners,

which includes clearly defined outcomes for learning (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The How Students Learn criterion consists of the instructional techniques of the staff, which includes researched best practices, student engagement, and resources used to aid in instruction (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The How Assessment is Used criterion is regarding assessment strategies used by teachers to measure student progress as well as student mastery (formative and summative assessments). The use of data and feedback to aid in the assessment process are a part of this criterion as well (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

In the third category of Support for Student Personal and Academic Growth, there are two criteria. The criteria are Student Connectedness and Parent/Community Involvement (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Student Connectedness criterion is related to the system of support that is provided to students and families within the school. This system of support includes curricular and co-curricular programming that support learner outcomes (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Within this criterion is the development of programs, implementation of programs, monitoring student involvement, and the consistent evaluation of the programming (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The second criterion in this category is that of Parent/Community Involvement. This criterion consists of the involvement of parents and community members in the life of the school. The school should have formal processes to gain involvement of parents and community members and seeks to gain the participation of community members in the long-range planning for the institution (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The fourth category in the rubric standards of the WASC is that of Resource Management and Development. This category consists of two criteria: Resources and Resource Planning

(Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Identified in the Resource criterion are the different resources that the members of the institution develop and use to meet the purpose of the institution. This includes financial, facility, technology, and material resources (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Resource Planning criterion addresses ways in which the governing authority of the institution plans for the future acquisition and use of resources that are aligned to learner outcomes (Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

New England Association of Schools and Colleges Standards. There are 14 standards divided into three categories as presented by the NEASC. These 14 standards include suggested indicators and required materials (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The 14 standards are divided into the three categories of Foundation Standards, Program Standards, and Strategic Planning Standard. In addition to these standards and indicators, the NEASC includes additional indicators for each standard for Catholic schools that are seeking accreditation (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The Foundation Standard category consists of the six standards of Enrolled Student Align Appropriately with the Mission, The Governing Body/Board Assures the School Remains Sustainable and True to its Mission, The School's Resources Sufficiently Support Present and Prospective Operation, The School Assures that the Adult Community is Qualified and Organized to Implement the Mission, A Proactive Culture of Health and Safety Permeates the School, and Proprietary Schools Ensure Effective Leadership, Clear Organizational Structure, and the Necessary Resources to Successfully Execute the Mission of the School for the Foreseeable Future (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Enrolled Students standard consists of five indicators and six required materials. The indicators in this

standard include aligning enrollment processes with the mission of the school and tracking enrollment trends. The required materials include an enrollment plan, proper marketing materials, contracts, handbooks, and the appropriate policies that align with the standard (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Governing Body/Board standards includes eight indicators and seven required materials. The indicators in this standard address best practices for governing bodies, financial and fiscal responsibility, self-management of the governing body, representation, and communication with the school community. The required materials consist of by-laws, meeting minutes, self-evaluation tools, and appropriate policies and protocols that align with this standard (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The School's Resources standard is comprised of eight indicators and eight required materials. The indicators in this standard address financial, enrollment, facility, advancement, and technology resources and the importance of these resources supporting student learning. The required materials include annual reports and budgets, financial plans, insurance reports and plans, and benefits for employees (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The standard regarding assurances that the adult community is qualified and organized to implement the mission has three suggested indicators and seven required materials (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The suggested indicators address hiring policies and practices that are aligned to the mission of the school and procedures that ensure the safety of students by checking the backgrounds of hired personnel. The required materials include lists of current employees and their responsibilities, organizational charts, contracts of employees, and faculty handbooks and code of conduct(s) (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The standard regarding the proactive culture of health and safety includes four suggested indicators addressing health and safety processes and reviews and school culture,

as well as two required materials which include crisis management plans and documentation of

compliance with health and safety statues and codes (New England Association of Schools and

Colleges, 2020). The standard regarding effective leadership, organizational structure, and

resources includes eight suggested indicators and two required materials (New England

Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The suggested indicators address the role of the

governing body and leadership of the school, including evaluation of the head of the school and

that the policies and procedures are reflective of the purpose and mission of the school. The

required materials for this standard are confidential and address the operations and finances of

the school (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The NEASC has seven program standards. The first standard in this category is

Commitment to Mission and Core Beliefs Informs Decisions, Guides Initiatives and Aligns with

the Students' Needs and Aspirations (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

This standard has five suggested indicators that address the mission of the institution. This

entails the mission integrated in the culture, the assessment of the relevance of the mission, and

the communications of the mission to stakeholders. In addition to these five suggested indicators,

there are two requirement materials. These materials are the current mission statement and the

vision and purpose statements (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The

next standard in this category is Commitment to Inspiration and Support Characterizes the

Approach to Each Student. Within this standard are nine suggested indicators and two required

materials. The suggested indicators in this standard relate to the social and emotional

development of students, the inclusion of all students, ensuring that students and parents'

concerns are heard, student engagement in the activities of the school, and teacher monitoring of

students' social emotional development. The two required materials in this standard are a school

inclusion survey and documentation that describes the services that are offered by the school (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Commitment to Excellence Distinguishes the Program standard is comprised of 10 suggested indicators and three required materials (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The suggested indicators in this standard support the academic program of the school. This includes the culture of the school, the program reflecting the mission of the school, curriculum planning that includes vertical as well as horizontal alignment, research informed practices, media and technology use, use of assessments to monitor student growth, and inclusion (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The required materials include the curriculum guide, examples of assessments and tools, and other documents that include international student plans (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Commitment to Continuous Professional Development standard includes eight suggested indicators addressing research, professional relationships, professional development planning that aligns with needs, staff evaluations, clarity in responsibilities, and clear communication (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The three required materials in this standard include documented professional development opportunities and professional evaluation documents (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The Commitment to Engaging with the Greater Community Enhances Student Experience standard is comprised of five suggested indicators that address effective communication with the greater community, interactions that take place between school personnel and the community, and alumni communication. There is one required material for this standard that is the documentation of communication with alumni and parents (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Commitment to Meeting the Needs of Each

Student Drives the Residential Program standard contains nine suggested indicators and three required materials (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The suggested indicators address the school's ability to ensure that the needs of residential students are being met, which includes residential spaces, technology infrastructure, and appropriate expectations and practices. The required materials include a student handbook, staff materials specific to the school's residential program, and a copy of the calendar for weekend activities for students (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of the Each Student Guides the School's Homestay Program standard contains 11 suggested indicators and two required materials. The suggested indicators include assurances that the school owns the responsibility of student home placement, that the facilities where students will stay is safe, that there is a process in place to screen host families, and that there are formal practices and procedures that the school will follow to place students with families. The required materials are the student handbook and the contract with an agency (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The last standard for the NEASC is a strategic planning standard in which the school shows a commitment to long-term viability and planning. In this standard, the only required material is a copy of the current strategic plan for the school. The suggested indicators include research, goals, identifying challenges that impede the strategic plan, considerations for diversity and inclusion, and the use of data in strategic planning (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

The NEASC has a self-study for Catholic schools that has additional indicators to the standards that are specific to Catholic schools. There are 15 additional suggested indicators for Catholic schools as provided by the NEASC. These indicators address Catholic identity as an element added to the standards. For the first foundation standard of Enrolled Students Align

Appropriately with the Mission, the added suggested indicator for Catholic school is "The mission of the school and the nature of its Catholic identity is reviewed with prospective families" (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). Catholic identity is used throughout these added suggested indicators for several of the standards. In addition to Catholic identity, religion classes and Catholic teaching are concepts added to the program standards. Within these indicators include the inclusion of Catholic teachings throughout the curriculum, religion programs that call students to grow in faith through service experiences, prayer, and the celebration of the sacraments, and goals that measure Catholic identity (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020). The development and training of teachers in the Catholic faith is also included in one indicator under the standard of professional development (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2020).

NSBECS. The NSBECS were developed to help Catholic school leaders determine school effectiveness and sustainability efforts (Ozar, et al., 2019; Ozar, Barton, & Calteaux, 2015; Erich & Salas, 2019). The NSBECS are categorized into four domains: Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, and Operational Vitality (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Within those four domains are 13 standards and 70 benchmarks designed to guide Catholic schools toward a higher degree of effectiveness (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012; Ozar et al., 2019). The NSBECS are used in Catholic dioceses all over the country in the areas of accreditation, planning, accountability, professional development, school guidelines, school assessment, personnel evaluation, and other various uses (Ozar et al., 2019). Ozar et al. (2019) surveyed Catholic school leaders around the United States to determine the implementation and effectiveness of the NSBECS; the researchers found that accreditation was the highest area of use of the NSBECS by Catholic school leaders. Of the respondents in the survey, 62.7%

indicated that they use the NSBECS for accreditation purposes. Catholic school leaders are aligning current accreditation standards with the NSBECS (Cepelka, 2019, Erich & Salas, 2019). Erich and Salas (2019) and Fortier (2019) found that the adoption of the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation in the five Catholic dioceses of Michigan and the Diocese of Orlando created a greater sense of collaboration and collegiality among Catholic educational leaders within the state.

Defining Characteristics. The first section of the NSBECS is the Defining Characteristics. This section stems from the Holy See's teaching on Catholic Schools (2006), as well as formal statements from American bishops and Pope Benedict XVI (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). According to Ozar and Weitzel-O'Neill (2012), "The characteristics define the deep Catholic identity of Catholic schools and serve as the platform on which the standards and benchmarks rest" (p. 7). The nine defining characteristics include Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ, Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church, Distinguished by Excellence, Committed to Educate the Whole Child, Steeped in a Catholic Worldview, Sustained by Gospel Witness, Shaped by Communion and Community, Accessible to All Students, and Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The defining characteristics represent Church teachings regarding the theological perspective of Catholic identity in Catholic schools (Ozar et al., 2019). "The defining characteristics authenticate the standards and benchmarks, justifying their existence and providing their meaning" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. VI).

Mission and Catholic Identity Domain. Domain one of the NSBECS is the Mission and Catholic Identity domain. This domain comprises four standards and 21 benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzell-O'Neill, 2012). Standard one describes a clearly communicated mission that embraces

Catholic identity. The five benchmarks in standard one address the mission statement of the school, which includes a commitment to Catholic identity. The mission statement should be used by the governing authority and leader/leadership team as the foundation for planning and should be reviewed consistently by various stakeholders, as well as be visible and understood by all stakeholders (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard two addresses the religious academic program. Within this standard are seven benchmarks relating to the religious curriculum of the Catholic school. This includes both religion classes and subject matter taught within the school, as well as the integration of scripture and Catholic tradition in all subject areas taught at the Catholic school. Religion classes should be an important aspect in the academic programming of the school, including staffing and resources. Faculty should meet the requirements of the (arch)diocese to teach religion classes or subject matter, Catholic culture should be present in the arts, both visual and performing, and Catholic Church social teaching should be present in the curriculum (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard three involves opportunities for students to participate in faith formation, prayer, and service outside of the classroom (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The four benchmarks in this standard address those opportunities, which include prayer, sacraments, retreats, service programs, and the experience of role models of the faith through administrators, faculty, and staff of the school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard four comprises five benchmarks that address adult faith formation within the school, which includes prayer experiences, retreats, catechesis, service programs, and the visible support of the school community by all faculty and staff members (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

 Catholic identity is one of the key critical elements that creates the unique culture of a Catholic school (Hagan & Houchens, 2017; Hobbie, Convey, & Schuttloffel, 2013) and impacts the academic excellence of Catholic schools (Ognibene, 2015). The purpose, behavior and

relationships in Catholic schools are rooted in the Catholic identity that permeates through the entire school (Hagan & Houchens, 2017; Hobbie, Convey, & Schuttloffel, 2013). The Catholic identity of Catholic schools is the foundation for all programming and efforts that occur within the school. For Catholic school leaders, the development of effective teachers must include a Catholic identity component. Hagan and Houchens (2017) note the importance of faculty meetings as one of the key avenues for professional and faith development of teachers.

School leadership is a critical component to continuous improvement efforts that drive student achievement (Bowers & White, 2014; Boyle et al., 2016; Huchting, Cunningham, Aldana, & Ruiz, 2017). Principal preparation and experience lead to increased effective leadership (Boyle et al., 2016). While many similarities exist between public and private schools, there are additional components, including Catholic identity and operational elements, necessary for Catholic school effectiveness, and Catholic school principal preparation, experiences, and evaluations must reflect those components (Boyle et al., 2016; Hobbie et al., 2013). Hobbie et al. (2013) found that Catholic identity and strong leadership are predictive of good school vitality. Catholic school principals are often faith leaders within their given school communities and have a direct impact on the Catholic culture and climate of the school (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009).

Governance and Leadership Domain. Domain two of the NSBECS is the Governance and Leadership domain, which consists of two standards and 13 benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard five of the NSBECS reflects the presence of a governing authority of person(s) that recognize and respect the (arch)diocesan authorities and make decisions, whether that be authoritative, consultative, or advisory, in collaboration with school leadership; the governing authority aids in overseeing the adherence to mission, academic excellence, and operations of the school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The benchmarks within standard five

address these areas of governance, as well as the formation and self-evaluation of the governing body itself and the leadership team of the Catholic school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard six contains seven benchmarks that address the leader/leadership team working toward the mission and vision of the Catholic school. This includes meeting national, state, and (arch)diocesan requirements; clear communication of the mission and vision to engage the school community; responsibility and oversight of school personnel, including faith formation of staff; collaboration; continuous improvement efforts; working with the governing body; and communication with stakeholders (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

The organizational structure of the Catholic Church is such that in Catholic schools that operate as a parish-school model, the parish pastor is the ultimate authority of all ministries of the parish, which includes the school (Boyle & Dosen, 2017; Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013; Huchting et al. 2017). Each pastor operates his parish differently and delegates authority to principals in different ways (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013). The importance of additional expertise and resources for pastors is critical to the operations of Catholic schools, which is why the governance model of the Catholic school is of importance. Given the recent decline in enrollment in Catholic schools across the country, newer governance models have emerged to further future sustainability in Catholic schools (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2013). Regardless of the different governance models, it is considered best practice that all Catholic schools (or school leadership with alternative governance models) have an active school board.

Academic Excellence Domain. The Academic Excellence domain of the NSBECS contains three standards and 18 benchmarks (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). A rigorous curriculum that is aligned with standard 21st century skills and Gospel values is described in standard seven. The 10 benchmarks in standard seven address vertical alignment, the integration

of a Catholic worldview, problem solving, critical thinking, preparing students to be proficient in the use of technology to solve problems and make decisions, classroom instruction as it relates to student dispositions and relationship building, student motivation and engagement, teacher collaboration, meeting (arch)diocesan and other state and federal requirements, modeling of Gospel values by staff, and professional development of faculty and staff members (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard eight of the NSBECS revolves around the use of assessment to inform student growth and curriculum development. The five benchmarks in standard eight address the use of data that stems from assessments to serve as a foundation for curriculum and co-curricular growth, sharing student data with stakeholders, using multiple assessments that are aligned with learning outcomes and instructional practices, the criteria that is used to evaluate student work, and the use of professional learning communities (PLC's) to develop common assessments and rubrics to evaluate student mastery (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Programs and services that are aligned to the mission of the Catholic school is the foundation for standard nine of the NSBECS (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). The three benchmarks in this standard address the partnership of parents/guardians and school leaders and faculty, guidance and wellness services that support students through the curriculum and programs, and co-curricular and extra-curricular programs and activities that help students develop their God-given gifts and talents to create a well-rounded program that aids in the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual growth of students (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Many parents send their children to Catholic schools for both academic excellence and faith formation (Maney, King, & Kiely, 2017). At the root of the academic excellence of a school is student learning and teacher effectiveness. Maney et al. (2017) contend that Catholic identity strengthens relationships between teachers and students in Catholic schools. These relationships

are critical to student learning, as there are teacher behaviors within these relationships that increase student motivation and engagement, which leads to increased student learning (Maney et al., 2017). Through their study, Maney et al. (2017) found that parents, regardless of socio-economic background, chose Catholic schools for their children because of the "Catholic-Christian values" (p. 53). Teachers are a significant factor in the success of students (Maney, et al., 2017); therefore, the development of teachers is one of great importance for school leaders.

  Operational Vitality Domain. The Operational Vitality domain of the NSBECS contains four standards and 18 benchmarks that address operational aspects of Catholic schools. Standard 10 of the NSBECS addresses financial planning and budgetary considerations. The eight benchmarks in this standard focus on financial planning by leader/leadership teams and governing bodies within Catholic schools; financial planning that includes stakeholders and experts in the field of finance; securing revenue streams that include tuition assistance, endowments, community partnerships, and other gifts; projected budgets that include any capital projects; communication of budgets and the cost of educating students to stakeholders; and using current and meaningful business practices to ensure proper stewardship (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard 11 of the NSBECS includes four benchmarks that address human resource programs and policies. These programs and policies should include proper job descriptions, compliance, compensation, benefits, succession planning, retirement, professional growth, and investment opportunities (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard 12 of the NSBECS is comprised of three benchmarks that address facilities, equipment, and technology. All these resources should align to the mission and the delivery of the educational programs within the Catholic school (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Standard 13 of the NSBECS includes three standards addressing communications, marketing, and development plans of the

Catholic school. This includes enrollment management and alumni(ae) development and growth (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Catholic schools in the United States are struggling with long-term viability and sustainability (Wolsonovich, Smilaycoff, & Ribera, 2018). Enrollment is a critical component of creating a viable Catholic school, and marketing to prospective families is critical for Catholic school leaders. According to Nuzzi, Holter, and Frabutt (as cited in Poole & Campos, 2017), marketing was considered one of the most important areas for which Catholic school elementary principals need assistance and resources. This is common for schools, as marketing in an educational setting has not been widely studied or applied until recent years (Poole & Campos, 2017). Specific needs of Catholic school operational elements include the use of marketing strategies that can potentially aid enrollment efforts.

Summary

One of the goals of accreditation is to increase school effectiveness through quality assurance and school improvement processes. Historical research on school effectiveness shows the evolution of school effectiveness that began with the idea that schools had no effect on student learning and achievement (Downey et al., 2008) and has evolved into multiple measures and processes that lead to effective schools, including the culture of schools (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000; Louis & Lee, 2016; Ozar et al., 2015). Effective schools have quality teachers and work to grow student learning and achievement; while many of those teachers do not understand the relationship between accreditation and effective classroom instruction (Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018); accreditation standards have the potential to bridge the gap of disconnection that exists. Quality assurances that stem from accreditation can improve institutional effectiveness (Brittingham, O'Brien, & Alig, 2008; Ulker & Bakioglu, 2018). The quality

assurances stem from standards which are not a widely studied concept; however, the use of standards by which institutions and organizations are measured has proven effective. This research has not translated into accreditation standards in K-12 accreditation.

The research that surrounds accreditation and quality assurances in educational institutions is largely found in the higher education setting. While accreditation has proven to be effective in higher education settings, there is a need for further research on K-12 accreditation. Empirical research indicates a high number of accrediting agencies in the United States, each with a set of standards that guide the accreditation process for member institutions (Wilkerson, 2017). There is little empirical research on the effectiveness of accreditation standards in K-12 accreditation and which standards used by the different accrediting agencies are most effective for school growth and improvement. In addition, Catholic schools are uniquely different than traditional public schools; further research is needed to explore how standards specifically designed to meet the unique needs of Catholic schools are used for accreditation. While there is empirical data that supports the efficacy of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools, there is not research that has been aimed to explore how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. Given the lack of empirical research on K-12 accreditation standards and the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation, there was a need for a study on how the NSBECS are being used for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. The research design, setting, procedures, data collection and analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations that follow were designed to outline the steps taken to conduct this study ethically with reliable and valid results. Descriptive, rich data from individual interviews, focus group interviews, documents and documentation, and a survey provide authenticity in data collection and analysis.

Design

Qualitative research is the process that "locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011 as cited by Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7). This study of how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools is a qualitative study, as the goal was to find participants in their settings and record their observations and experiences regarding the social phenomena. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that qualitative research should be used when the researcher wants to explore a "problem or issue" (p. 45). Conversely, quantitative research involves survey research, experimental research, or causal-comparative research in which researchers use statistical analyses to determine relationships among variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this study, a qualitative case-study design was the most applicable research method, as this researcher wanted to explore the issue of how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. Case study research is one in which the researcher studies a phenomenon in real world context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). The

purpose was to explore Catholic school leaders' use of the NSBECS (the issue) in the real-world

application of accreditation and school improvement efforts in their diocese and Catholic

schools. This design was appropriate for this study as the NSBECS are relatively new in the

accreditation of Catholic schools in the United States. The NSBECS were created in 2012 to help

Catholic schools in planning, school improvement, and accreditation (Ozar et al., 2019). The use

of the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools is an issue in which

lessons could be learned from Catholic school leaders. According to Yin (2014), "the distinctive

need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" (p. 5). In

addition to the case study design, Creswell and Poth (2018) note four other qualitative research

designs: narrative, phenomenological, ethnography, and grounded theory. Narrative research is

focused on telling stories of the experiences of individuals, phenomenological studies are meant

to discover participants' lived experiences with a phenomenon, ethnographic research relies on

interpreting the "shared patterns" (p. 67) of a culture or group, and the focus of grounded theory

research is the development of a theory that stems from data collected in the field (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). A case study research design was the best fit for this study because of the desire to

explore the lessons that could be learned from Catholic school leaders' use of the NSBECS for

accreditation and school improvement. The NSBECS are a novel phenomenon, as they were

developed recently in 2012; Yin (2014) suggested that case studies explore contemporary

phenomenon in real-world social contexts. This case study followed a constructivist approach,

meaning that the goal was to explore the different uses of the phenomenon by the participants

(Yin, 2014).

Within case study research, problems can arise when researchers select study questions

that are too general in nature; one way for researchers to combat this problem is through binding

the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Binding the case is when researchers place boundaries on the

case such as participants selected, time and place, etc. (Yin, 2014). By placing these boundaries

on the case, researchers can keep a specific focus for their case study research and data collection

that is fixed on the research questions. The bounded case in this study was the Diocese of St.

Xavier (pseudonym) over a timeframe of six to nine months. Binding this case to a period no

longer than nine months allowed for document collection, individual interviews, and focus group

interviews, and kept a focus on the research questions. Within this bounded case, three

embedded subunits were studied. According to Baxter and Jack (2008),

> The ability to look at subunits that are situated within a larger case is powerful when you
>
> consider that data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis),
>
> between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits
>
> (cross-case analysis). (p. 550)

Including subunits allowed for richer, thicker data to be collected and analyzed in the

bounded case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The embedded subunits in this study were individual, local

Catholic schools within the bounded case of the Diocese of St. Xavier. Participants in the

embedded subunits were principals and teachers that all had experience using the NSBECS for

accreditation in their respective Catholic schools.

This specific method of case study research chosen for this study was an explanatory case

study design. Researchers use an explanatory case study when they are "seeking to answer a

question that sought to explain the presumed causal links in real-life interventions" (Baxter &

Jack, 2008, p. 547). An explanatory case study was chosen in order to examine the real-life

context of Catholic school leaders' use of the NSBECS to inform school improvement processes

through accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools. This study sought to answer the question of how

Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on school growth and improvement in their Catholic schools.

Research Questions

This qualitative single-case study to explore how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools was guided by a central research question and two research sub-questions.

Central Research Question

How do Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation?

Research Sub-questions

SQ1

How do Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

SQ2

How, if at all, can the NSBECS be improved to further influence overall school growth and improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

Setting

The setting of this study was a Catholic diocese located in the Midwest region of the United States. The diocese for this study was selected because of the accreditation processes within the diocese. For confidentiality reasons, a pseudonym will be used to identify the Catholic diocese for this study. In addition, census data and school data provided was done so in a range due to the possibility of identifiers in the data. As of most recent census data from July 1, 2019, the city located in the Midwest region of the United States, where the Diocese of St. Xavier

(pseudonym) is located, has a population between 175,000 and 215,000. The Diocese of St.

Xavier has between twenty-one and thirty-seven Catholic elementary schools and between three

and eight Catholic high schools for a total of between twenty-four and forty-three schools. Those

schools serve between 4,000 and 9,000 students. The Diocese of St. Xavier is led by the bishop

of the diocese, who is the ultimate authority in the Catholic schools. The bishop is represented by

the superintendent of Catholic schools, who leads the Catholic schools in the diocese. In addition

to the superintendent, the Diocese of St. Xavier Catholic schools office has one associate

superintendent of schools and employs various other personnel and staff that support the

Catholic schools of the diocese.

Participants

For this study that explored how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as the primary

standards to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation, the study began

with purposeful, criterion sampling. Suri (2011) recognized that purposeful sampling requires the

researcher to connect with important people in the field. In doing so, the researcher gathers

"insights and in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2002, p. 273). The superintendents of Catholic

dioceses are critical to accreditation efforts of Catholic schools, as accreditation efforts are

systemic in nature. The superintendent and associate superintendents were the first participants

approached for this study because of their involvement in the accreditation processes of each

school and the overall accreditation of the diocese. According to Noy (2008), snowball sampling

is the leveraging of social networks of participants to gain access to additional participants that

have experience with the phenomenon. In this study, the social networks of the superintendents

and associate superintendents were used to incorporate snowball sampling to determine school

leaders who were responsible for the accreditation processes of the schools within the diocese.

These participants were accreditation review team chairs and principals, assistant principals, and teachers at the Catholic schools within the diocese of St. Xavier. Further snowball sampling provided participants for focus groups from the embedded subunits.

The size of samples in qualitative research varies depending on the design; however, in qualitative research, sample sizes are relatively small varying from 3-30 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) also note the importance of identifying the sample population (sample pool) of participants. Another important concept in qualitative research regarding participants is that of data saturation. Data saturation involves the researcher no longer increasing data once applicable themes have been exhausted and no new data is becoming a reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this qualitative single case study, there were 15 participants, and sampling ceased upon data saturation. The sample pool of potential participants was between 50 and 60. Participants consented to participate in this study and completed a demographic questionnaire through a Google Form that was provided upon invitation to participate. Participants consented to participate and provided permission to be recorded in audio and/or video recording as part of the study. In addition, participants provided demographic information including race, ethnicity, age, and experience using the NSBECS for school improvement and accreditation. All 15 participants identified as White; two of the participants indicated they were of Hispanic ethnicity, while the other 13 participants indicated ethnicity of non-Hispanic descent. Two participants were under the age of 30, four participants were between 31 and 40 years of age, three participants were between 41 and 50 years old, two participants were between 51 and 60 years of age, and four participants were over the age of 60.

Table 1

Study Participants

Study Participant	Position	Race/Ethnicity	Age	NSBECS Experience Self-rating
Elizabeth	Former Assistant Superintendent	White/non-Hispanic	31-40	5
Thomas	Superintendent	White/non-Hispanic	51-60	4
Eric	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	41-50	4
Alice	Assistant Superintendent	White/non-Hispanic	31-40	5
Gwen	Principal	White/non-Hispanic	41-50	5
Justin	Principal	White/non-Hispanic	41-50	3
Bethany	Board Member	White/non-Hispanic	Over 60	4
Madeline	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	Over 60	5
James	Principal	White/non-Hispanic	31-40	3
Jane	Principal	White/Hispanic	Over 60	3
Emily	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	31-40	3
Karen	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	51-60	4
Rebecca	Teacher	White/Hispanic	Under 30	4
Alex	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	Under 30	2
Sally	Teacher	White/non-Hispanic	Over 60	3

Procedures

The beginning step in the procedures for this qualitative single case study was to seek site approval. The superintendent of the Diocese of St. Xavier was contacted via email with a specific script that was written for site approval (Appendix A). After receiving site approval, the application to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was completed. The purpose of seeking IRB approval was to ensure that this study followed ethical procedures with regard to the inclusion of human subjects in research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Approval from the Liberty University IRB (Appendix B) was received and the data collection process with purposeful sampling began. The study began with the superintendent and former associate superintendent of the Diocese of St. Xavier and snowball sampling was conducted. Participants were contacted via a recruitment email (Appendix C). Those who agreed to participate in the study were provided an informed consent form (Appendix D) that described the study and how the participants could consent to participate and how they could opt out of the study. As part of the informed consent process, participants completed an introductory questionnaire via a Google Form (Appendix E), where they consented to participate in the study, completed demographic information, and answered one question regarding their confidence in using the NSBECS for school improvement and accreditation. After the initial participants were selected, snowball sampling was employed to gain additional participants who were contacted in the same manner, given the same consent form, and followed the same process. It was communicated that participation in this study was completely voluntary and optional, all information would be kept confidential, and that pseudonyms would be used for the site and participants. A minimum of 10 participants, including a minimum of three participants from each embedded subunit, were secured to conduct the study. Initially, data was collected from the participants in the form of

documents, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. After the initial data collection and analyzing the data, it was decided that additional data would be collected through a survey of the participants. First, a modification needed to be submitted to the Liberty University IRB to continue to follow the ethical procedures for the study. Approval was received for the modification (Appendix F) to be able to collect additional data through the survey. To ensure accuracy of information and experiences from participants, interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts of individual and focus group interviews were provided to participants to conduct member checking, which ensured accuracy of data collection and credibility.

The Researcher's Role

According to Stake (1995), case study researchers may implement various roles in their studies, including that of interpreter. The role that I served in conducting this case study was that of an interpreter. I did not serve as a participant in the study, rather, I sought to interpret the data collected to accurately reflect the experiences and perceptions of the participants in the study. At the time of this study, I currently serve as an associate superintendent of schools for a Midwest Catholic diocese, and I have experience using the NSBECS for various initiatives and projects, including as a framework for local school accreditation visits. I have found the NSBECS as a useful resource to aid strategic planning and school improvement efforts in Catholic schools. For this reason, it was important to me to minimize bias. One of the ways that I minimized bias was using memos. "Memos are short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 188). Memoing begins with data collection and continues to the conclusions and reporting lessons learned in the case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using memos (Appendix G) was a way that I interpreted the subjective experiences of the participants

and was a way to generate an audit trail. "Dating each memo helps keep track of the evolution of your study" (Saldana, 2016, p. 45).

Yin (2014) highlighted the importance of listening as part of case study research. Listening involves more than hearing what participants are saying. It is the process of seeing what is happening in interviews and recording the specific words used by participants, as terminology is important, and understanding the mood and context of the experiences of the participants with the phenomenon in the social context (Yin, 2014). I collected this data through memos, which helped minimize bias (Appendix G). Due to my experiences using the NSBECS, the way I interpreted the data was important to maintaining ethical procedures. Yin (2014) explained that to interpret data ethically, case study researchers must remain open to contrary evidence and attempt to avoid any preconceptions regarding the phenomenon.

Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative studies involves gaining participant permission, developing an effective sampling strategy, organizing the recording of the data, adjusting procedures and processes based on collected data from the field, and storing the data securely (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As part of the procedures in this qualitative single case study, a case study database was developed. A case study database is "a separate and orderly compilation of all the data from a case study" (Yin, 2014, p. 131). Creating a case study database creates greater reliability through an organized way for others to view the data, as well as help the researcher find data to aid in triangulation. It is also a means for conducting an audit of the audit trail. In qualitative research, data triangulation is important to create rich and reliable data (Yin, 2014). Data triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data to discover similarities or contrary evidence within the data (Yin, 2014). Data collection methods for this qualitative single case study included accreditation

documents, embedded subunit focus group interviews, individual interviews, and a participant survey. Data was triangulated to ensure trustworthiness in data collection and evidence, as well as ensure that the study was both reliable and valid.

Documents and Documentation

According to Yin (2014), documents and documentation are relevant data sources in case study research; however, documents and documentation do have disadvantages. Information can be withheld and information in documents does not always come without some form of bias (Yin, 2014). For these reasons, documents and documentation should be alongside other sources of evidence that can validate the accuracy of the information and data. Documents were initially used to identify embedded subunits that have distinct characteristics to maximize transferability and generalizability.

Accreditation documents, such as accreditation reports, accreditation governing body documents, and embedded subunit strategic plans were analyzed as part of this case study. In subsequent stages of data collection, participants were asked to "provide any relevant documents and/or documentation that is not confidential in nature that describes or documents how the NSBECS are used for accreditation and school improvement and can aid in the focus of the research study." Accreditation documents were provided by the superintendent of schools and local school principals. Access was given to the accreditation reports for the three embedded subunits in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Any shared accreditation documents, including the accreditation reports, were kept on a password protected computer, of which this researcher was the only person with access, and backed up on Microsoft One Drive that was also password protected. The documents that were collected were specific to the accreditation process within the dioceses of St. Xavier and/or the specific schools located within the diocese.

Embedded Subunit Focus Group Interviews

Embedded focus group interviews consisted of members of principals and faculty of schools within the Diocese of St. Xavier who had experience using the NSBECS for accreditation at their respective schools. Embedded subunit focus group interviews were conducted via video conference on Zoom. While focus group interviews share some similarities with individual interviews, focus group interviews are not designed to collect similar data from all the participants (Gill et al., 2008). "Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating a rich understanding of experiences and beliefs" (Gill et al., 2008, p. 293). One of the purposes of the embedded focus group interviews was to identify central participants at each school and invite those participants to individual interviews to gather more extensive data on their use of the NSBECS.

The embedded subunit focus group questions (Appendix H) were as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your professional role(s) and responsibilities.

2. Please describe your role and experience(s) with accreditation in your Catholic school.

3. Describe how you use the NSBECS for accreditation in your school.

4. In your opinion, how do the NSBECS influence overall school improvement through the accreditation process?

5. In your opinion, how, if at all, could the NSBECS be improved to further address school improvement in Catholic schools?

6. What else can you share, or do you suggest I ask in future focus groups?

Yin (2014) explained that focus group interviews in a case study are smaller in nature to give the researcher the opportunity to facilitate a discussion to garner the views of the participants. The focus group questions were designed to address the central research question and sub questions that guided this study.

Individual Interviews

Qualitative individual interviews are designed to understand better specific experiences of participants that cannot be gained through surveys or quantitative methods of data collection (Gill et al., 2008). In this qualitative single case study, individual interviews brought to light how participants use the NSBECS for accreditation purposes and their perceptions on the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement in their Catholic schools. Interview questions were designed to get to know participants to create this social interaction, as well as bring about experiences with the phenomenon and discover participant perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on school growth and improvement (Appendix I). Interviews were completed virtually via Zoom, recorded for accuracy purposes, and transcribed verbatim.

Individual interview questions and discussions were as follows:

1. Please introduce yourself.

2. Please describe your professional role and responsibilities.

3. Please describe your experience(s) with the NSBECS.

4. Describe your experiences with accreditation in Catholic Schools.

5. What are the current processes for accreditation in your diocese (diocesan leaders)?

6. What are the current processes for accreditation in your Catholic school (school administrators)?

7. How do you use the NSBECS for accreditation?

8. In your opinion, how has using the NSBECS in multiple accreditation years impacted school growth and improvement?

9. What type of data do you collect in the accreditation process?

10. How do you use the NSBECS to collect and/or track data in the accreditation process?

11. What influence have the NSBECS had on systemic school growth and continuous improvement in your diocese (diocesan leaders)?

12. What influence have the NSBECS had on school growth and continuous improvement in your Catholic school (school administrators)?

13. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving the culture of your Catholic school(s).

14. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving leadership in your Catholic school(s).

15. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving student performance in your Catholic school(s).

16. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving the operations of your Catholic school(s).

17. How, if at all, could the NSBECS be improved to better influence overall school growth and continuous improvement?

18. What additional information can you share, or what do you suggest I ask in future interviews?

Questions 1-2 were meant to get to know the participants and create a social interaction, as well as to help gain a better understanding of their professional role(s) and responsibilities. Individual interviews are social experiences between the interviewer and the interviewee

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). To fully understand the experiences of the participants, it was important that the social interactions were addressed that would occur through the interview process.

Question 3 was designed to gain a better understanding of the participants' experiences and understanding of the NSBECS. Ozar et al. (2019) explained that the NSBECS have multiple uses for Catholic dioceses and schools, and these uses help school and diocesan leaders better understand the NSBECS.

Accreditation is one of the factors in the effectiveness of schools (Makhoul, 2019). Questions 4-6 helped for a better understanding of the experiences of the participants with accreditation and the specific processes for accreditation in their diocese and schools.

Questions 7-12 addressed the uses of the NSBECS for accreditation in the participants' diocese and schools. This researcher wanted to understand how they use the NSBECS as the guiding standards for accreditation in their diocese and schools. Accreditation standards are important to quality assurance in schools (Can, 2016). Data is an important and required part of the accreditation process in schools (Ehren & Swanborn, 2012). The data that was collected and used was based on the standards that guide the accreditation process. It is important to understand how participants used the NSBECS to collect and track data.

Questions 13-16 were designed to gain a better understanding of the perception of the participants on the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement and overall school growth within the four domains of the NSBECS. When undertaking school improvement efforts, it is critical for school leaders to consider the importance of the "whole" (p. 7) school (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2004). The NSBECS address the unique needs of the "whole" Catholic school throughout the four domains (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012).

Question 17 allowed for participants to share their perceptions on the possible ways that the NSBECS could be improved to allow for greater influence on overall school growth and continuous improvement.

Question 18 was designed to allow for any additional insight or information that participants wished to provide. In addition, there was the opportunity for participants to indicate suggested questions for future interviews.

Participant Survey

As part of this study, participants were asked to complete a survey (Appendix K). The survey was designed as a form of member checking, as well as to gather further perceptions from the participants as to the influence of the NSBECS, influence of the accreditation process, and the importance of the themes and subthemes that emerged in data analysis.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

One of the challenges of case study design is that there are not standard statistical ways of analyzing the data (Yin, 2014). For this reason, case study researchers can develop an "analytic strategy" (p. 167) when beginning to analyze data collected in a case study (Yin, 2014). To analyze data in an embedded case study, part of the strategy was to focus on the data in the embedded subunits. Through a process of coding, the data within each embedded subunit were analyzed. Themes were developed in the data within each embedded subunit and these themes between subunits and across all three subunits were analyzed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Analyzing data across embedded subunits allowed for the development of analytic generalizations, the lessons that were learned at a "conceptual level" (p. 38) from the study (Yin, 2014).

A two-cycle coding approach was employed (Saldana, 2016). Interviews, both individual and focus group, were transcribed verbatim. These transcriptions were read and reread to analyze

the data. Prior to coding, it is important to read and reread the data; as Saldana (2016) indicated, "your subconscious, not just your coding system, develops connections that lead to flashes of insight" (p. 70). The first cycle coding methods that were used were process coding and values coding (Saldana, 2016). Process coding involves the use of gerunds (words ending in "-ing"), which brings action to the data that was collected (Saldana, 2016). Saldana (2016) proposed that process coding is well suited for analyzing "routines of human life" (p. 111) as well as "changing and repetitive forms of action" (p. 111). This coding method aligns with both the purpose of this study as well as the theoretical framework of routinized action theory, as accreditation is a normal routine for Catholic school leaders, as well as a routine that can lead to organizational change through repetitive iterations.

Values coding is a way of analyzing data to provide insight into the value, attitude, and beliefs of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon (Saldana, 2016). This brought the participants' perspectives of how they used the NSBECS for accreditation and their perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement in their Catholic schools. Both process coding and values coding are applicable methods for individual and focus group interview data (Saldana, 2016). As part of the analytic strategy, themes in the data were generated. Theming the data is placing the data in themes or categories, which is a way to determine the *meaning* of the data (Saldana, 2016). To minimize bias as much as possible, it is important as a part of this process to continue to seek any contrasting evidence as well (Yin, 2014). To seek contrary evidence, a matrix of themes is developed, and similarities and differences are analyzed (Saldana, 2016).

The second cycle coding method that was used for data analysis is pattern coding. The data analysis in the first cycle of coding is a way to summarize the data (Saldana, 2016). Pattern

coding is a way to group previous data into smaller and more specific themes or categories. This method was a way for to develop emerging themes or explanations that were presented in the data (Saldana, 2016). According to Saldana (2016), the pattern codes are used "as a stimulus to develop a statement that describes a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data" (p. 238).

For this qualitative single case study, the data analysis strategy of relying on theoretical propositions as noted by Yin (2014) was used. In this strategy, the researcher begins with the theoretical propositions that led to the study questions and the reason for conducting the case study. The theoretical propositions that led to this study's research questions involved the importance of specific Catholic standards for accreditation and school improvement efforts used in Catholic K-12 schools. Standards that address the unique needs and operations of Catholic schools are important to Catholic school improvement efforts. This led to the research questions that guided this study. The analytic technique that was used to analyze the data was explanation building as noted by Yin (2014). Explanation building involves analyzing the data to develop an explanation about the case and is often a technique used in an explanatory case study. This led to lessons learned in the case study, also known as *analytic generalizations*, "that go beyond the setting for the specific case or experiment that had been studied" (Yin, 2014, p. 38).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is attained using *validity strategies* (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Yin (2014) acknowledged that there are three ways to develop construct validity in case studies: using multiple sources of data, creating a chain of evidence during data collection, and having the draft of the case study report "reviewed by key informants" (p. 44). To ensure the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability in this study, multiple procedures were used to

ensure validity which included data triangulation from multiple sources, member checking, and an external audit of the case study report.

Credibility

Data was triangulated from multiple sources (individual interviews, focus group interviews, and documents) to give the data analysis credibility. Themes were developed by aggregating codes from interviews and other forms of data that accurately reflected the experiences of participants using the NSBECS for accreditation purposes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) affirmed that the triangulation of data is the use of multiple sources of data that justifies the themes that are developed from the data. Member checking is when the researcher provides report findings to the participants to ensure the accuracy of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of interview transcriptions and notes, the themes that were produced, and the findings from the study.

Dependability and Confirmability

Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasized the importance of qualitative researchers spending an appropriate amount of time in the field, as well as presenting accurate and comprehensive information and data that is collected, even if that data runs counter to themes that have emerged. All information and data that was collected was done so with accuracy through recordings, transcribing procedures, memos, and member checking. In addition, an external auditor was used to review the process and the study to ensure validity and reliability of the study.

Transferability

"Scholars seeking to meet the criterion of transferability must be able to provide sufficient detail to contextualize their interpretations" (Gill, Gill, & Roulet, 2017, p. 199). To

ensure transferability, data was collected from multiple sources and the data was triangulated. This data triangulation occurred through analyzing data within the embedded subunits as well as across the bounded case. By using multiple sources for data collection and developing specific data collection procedures, researchers provide studies that can be replicated (Yin, 2014). Through data collection strategies and data analysis strategies, multiple sources and procedures were provided that led to the replication and transferability in this study.

Ethical Considerations

In this qualitative single case study of how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools, one Catholic United States dioceses was studied. Pseudonyms were used to protect the setting, as well as all the participants in this study. Participants were informed of consent and right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point during the study (See Appendix B). All documentation, which included individual interview recordings and transcripts, focus group interview recordings and transcripts, and documents provided by participants were stored on a software system protected by a password or stored on a password protected computer of which this researcher is the only person that has access to the computer and the password. Virtual recordings were collected on a password protected computer of which this researcher is the only person with access. Participant names were not used in data collection or storage; pseudonyms were used to protect the participants. Extra precaution was taken to limit identifiers in the data collection process. Data will be kept for three years after the study on a password protected computer; data will be permanently deleted after that period.

Summary

This study was a qualitative single case study designed to explore how Catholic school leaders in a Catholic diocese in the Midwestern United States use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. Accuracy in data collection using multiple sources created replication and transferability. Data was collected through individual interviews, focus group interviews, collection of documents/documentation, and a participant survey. Pseudonyms were used for the sites as well as the participants to ensure ethical practices and confidentiality within the study. Data was collected through multiple sources and a two-cycle coding approach was used to analyze the data. Data was placed into themes, and both similarities and differences in the overarching themes were analyzed. Multiple procedures were used to ensure validity of the study including data triangulation, member checking, and an external audit.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools as a framework for accreditation. The Diocese of St. Xavier is the bounded case in this study, which also includes three embedded subunits. The embedded subunits are three of the schools within the bounded case of the Diocese of St. Xavier. This chapter begins with a brief description of the 15 participants in this study and continues with the results from the study. The results are displayed through themes and subthemes organized by the central research question and the two research sub questions. Outlier findings and a summary of the themes and major findings conclude the chapter.

Participants

The participants in this sample were teachers ($n = 7$), principals ($n = 4$), diocesan leaders ($n = 3$), and a board member ($n = 1$) in the Diocese of St. Xavier in the Midwest region of the United States. The participants represented the diocesan education office and four different Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Each of the participants had both accreditation experience and experience using the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) for school improvement. There are varying levels of experiences in accreditation and using the NSBECS within the participant sample. The descriptions of the participants explain participant demographic information and accreditation experiences in Catholic schools.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth was a White, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 31-40 years old. She previously served the Diocese of St. Xavier as the assistant superintendent. Additionally, she was the regional coordinator of the state accreditation for non-public schools. In her role as assistant superintendent for the diocese, she served as the lead administrator at the diocesan level for all accreditation in the diocese. She coordinated teams that would serve in the schools and had oversight into the accreditation process for all the Catholic schools in the diocese. In addition, Elizabeth sat alongside all team chairs for all accreditation visits in the diocese of St. Xavier. As the regional coordinator for accreditation for non-public schools, she would review annual accreditation reports from schools prior to sending them to the state non-public association for official determination of accreditation awards.

Thomas

Thomas served as the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of St. Xavier. He was a White, non-Hispanic male in the age range of 51-60 years old. Thomas served as the bishop's delegate to all of the Catholic schools and was also the canonical administrator for the diocesan high schools. While the assistant superintendent oversees the accreditation in the diocese, Thomas read through the accreditation reports that stemmed from all accreditation visits to Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier.

Eric

Eric was a teacher at St. Takeri School (pseudonym) in the Diocese of St. Xavier. He was a White, non-Hispanic male in the age range of 41-50 years old. He taught religion and was the accreditation chair for the accreditation committee at St. Takeri School. He had been involved in the school's accreditation committee and school improvement team beginning in his second year at the school. He had been through three cycles of accreditation at St. Takeri School with the

most recent accreditation visit in the spring of 2021 using the NSBECS as the guiding standards as the framework for accreditation. Eric had served as a team member on an accreditation visit to another school in the Diocese of St. Xavier.

Alice

Alice served as the assistant superintendent for the Diocese of St. Xavier. She was a White, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 31-40 years old. At the time of the interview, Alice served in this role for just five months. As part of her responsibility, she oversaw the accreditation process in the diocese and served as a team member on all accreditation visits. Alice attended a Catholic university for her graduate studies, and the NSBECS were a part of the curriculum of the program. In addition, Alice served as a principal of a Catholic school in a different diocese where she used the NSBECS in various ways, although not as a part of the accreditation process.

Gwen

Gwen was a White, non-Hispanic female in the age range of 41-50. Gwen was the principal of St. Andrew Catholic School (pseudonym) in the Diocese of St. Xavier. At the time of the interview, St. Andrew was a Pre-K through 8th grade school with approximately 150 students. Gwen had been the principal of St. Andrew for less than four years and had gone through the accreditation process within the last year. Gwen had served on accreditation visit teams in multiple dioceses as a teacher and as a building principal. Gwen had experience using the NSBECS for accreditation, school improvement, and strategic planning in multiple schools.

Justin

Justin was the principal at St. Takeri School in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Justin was a White, non-Hispanic male in the age range of 41-50. Justin had been the principal at St. Takeri

School for less than two years. In his first year as principal, the school had their first accreditation visit using the NSBECS as the guiding standards for the accreditation process. Prior to this experience, Justin served as a team member on multiple accreditation visits in the diocese.

Bethany

Bethany was a White, non-Hispanic female who was over 60 years old. She served as the chair of the school board for St. Andrew Catholic School in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Bethany had prior experience with accreditation as a parent of students in Catholic schools and was involved in the accreditation process for the most recent visit at St. Andrew as the school board chair.

Madeline

Madeline was a White, non-Hispanic female who was over 60 years of age. She was a middle school teacher at St. Andrew Catholic School and was also a member of the school's accreditation committee. Madeline had been involved in the accreditation process at St. Andrew Catholic School for many years and multiple accreditation cycles using the NSBECS as the guiding standards for accreditation.

James

James was a White, non-Hispanic male in the age range of 31-40 years old. He was the principal of St. Joan of Arc Catholic School (pseudonym) in the Diocese of St. Xavier. He had been in this role for less than two years. James had served as an accreditation team member as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal using the NSBECS as the guiding standards for those processes. In addition, James completed his graduate studies at a Catholic university where the NSBCES were a focus as a part of the coursework.

Jane

Jane was a White, Hispanic female that was over 60 years of age. Jane served as the principal at Holy Cross Catholic School (pseudonym) in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Jane was a new principal that had very little experience with accreditation using the NSBECS. She had been the principal at Holy Cross for less than four years. She came to the Diocese of St. Xavier from a local public school, where she was the principal. She had experience with accreditation in public schools; her accreditation experiences in Catholic schools were limited to the preparations for the next accreditation visit at Holy Cross.

Emily

Emily was a White, non-Hispanic female that was between 31 and 40 years old. She was a teacher at St. Takeri School. Emily had experiences with accreditation as a teacher, serving on multiple accreditation teams, and as a board member and parent at one of the elementary schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Each of these experiences used the NSBECS as the guiding standards for the accreditation process. At the time of the study, she was new to serving on an accreditation committee at her school.

Karen

Karen was a White, non-Hispanic female who was between 51 and 60 years old. She was a resource teacher at St. Andrew Catholic School in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Karen had been through three accreditation visits at St. Andrew Catholic School, and she served on the accreditation committee. She had also been a team member on an accreditation visit to another school in the diocese.

Rebecca

Rebecca was a White, Hispanic female who was under 30 years old. She was a middle school teacher at Holy Cross Catholic School in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Rebecca was on the

accreditation team at Holy Cross and had served as a team member on an accreditation visit to another school in the diocese.

Alex

Alex was a White, non-Hispanic male who was under 30 years old. He was in his second year at Holy Cross Catholic School in the Diocese of St. Xavier as a teacher. In his first year, he was a full-time teacher and had transitioned to a part-time position in his second year. In addition to teaching part-time, he was on the accreditation committee at the school. This was Alex's first experience in a leadership role with accreditation using the NSBECS.

Sally

Sally was a White, non-Hispanic female who was over 60 years of age. She was a technology teacher at Holy Cross Catholic School in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Sally had been through the accreditation process as a teacher multiple times at Holy Cross and served in a leadership capacity on the accreditation committee for the school.

Results

This study was guided by the following central research question: How do Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation? In addition to the central research question, two research sub questions further explored the participants' perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS and possible improvements to the NSBECS that can further growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools. Sub question one explored how Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools. Sub question two was designed to examine how, if at all, can the NSBECS be improved to

further influence overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools.

Purposeful criterion sampling was used to identify important people in the field (Suri, 2011), and

snowball sampling was used to leverage the social networks of the initial participants to gain

further participation. Data was collected through individual interviews (Appendix I), embedded

subunit focus group interviews (Appendix H), site documents (Appendix J), and a survey

(Appendix K). Participants were asked to provide their confidence level on a scale of one to five

in their understanding and use of the NSBECS for school improvement and accreditation, with a

rating of one being not confident and a rating of five being very confident. Of the 15 participants,

five rated their confidence level at a five, four rated their confidence level at a four, an additional

five participants rated their confidence level at a three, and one participant rated his confidence

level at a two. Fourteen of the 15 participants took the survey. Initially, 12 participants filled out

the survey. An additional invitation to complete the survey was sent out to the remaining three

participants, and two additional people participated in the survey. Interview data was analyzed

through a two-cycle coding approach. First cycle coding included value coding and process

coding, and second cycle coding included pattern coding (Appendix L).

Table 2

Codes

1st Cycle Value Codes	1st Cycle Process Codes	2nd Cycle Pattern Codes
NSBECS Improvement Influence on Growth and Continuous Improvement Uniqueness of Catholic Schools Contrast of Standards Dissatisfaction with Secular Standards Serving on a Team Quality/Excellence Enrollment Consistency	Adjusting Prioritizing Planning Accrediting Process Needing Training Collecting Data Using NSBECS Using Data Growing	Differentiation Redundancy Planning Strategic Planning Planning for School Improvement Uniqueness of Catholic Schools School Boards/Committees Enrollment

Evidence	2nd Iteration	School Improvement
Overwhelmed	Changing	Consistency
NSBECS as Influential	Scoring	Data Collection
	Self-assessing	Self-assessing
		Scoring/Rating

Through second cycle pattern coding, themes and subthemes were developed that were organized around the central research question and two research sub questions (Appendix M).

Table 3

Themes

Research Question	Major Themes	Subthemes
CRQ – Use of NSBECS	Planning Data Collection Self-assessing	Strategic Planning School Improvement
SQ1 – Influence of NSBECS	Influence Addressing the Uniqueness of Catholic Schools	Marketing and Enrollment Catholic Identity and Catholicity School Boards and Committees
SQ2 – Improvement of NSBECS	Differentiation Redundancy	

Themes were identified through the process of 1st and 2nd cycle coding of interviews and through document analysis. To triangulate the data, the emergence of patterns of codes (themes) in all three data sources were analyzed. Table 4 shows the emergence of themes within the individual interviews.

Table 4

Theme Emergence in Individual Interviews

Theme	Elizabeth	Thomas	Eric	Alice	James	Jane	Gwen

Planning	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Data Collection	X	X	X	X	X		X
Self-assessing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Influence	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Redundancy			X		X		X
Differentiation			X				X

Table 5 shows the emergence of themes within focus group interviews in the three embedded subunits.

Table 5

Theme Emergence in Focus Group Interviews

Theme	St. Takeri School	St. Andrew School	Holy Cross School
Planning	X	X	X
Data Collection	X	X	X
Self-assessing		X	X
Influence	X	X	X
Redundancy	X	X	
Differentiation	X	X	X

To analyze the site documents, keywords were sought out; these keywords were then organized by the themes (Appendix M). In addition to the data being analyzed in the aggregate, data was

also analyzed in the embedded subunits using a within case analysis, between two cases analysis, and across all three cases analysis. The three embedded subunits consisted of three Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Embedded subunits included a secondary school consisting of grades 9-12, and two K-8 elementary schools, one of which served Latino families.

Central Research Question

This study was guided by the central research question: How do Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation? Three major themes emerged from the central research question: (a) planning, (b) data collection, and (c) self-assessing. All three of these themes are present in the individual interviews, embedded subunit focus group interviews, and site documents. In addition to these data sources, participants were given the opportunity to share additional data through their perceptions of the importance of these themes in the survey. Participants were asked to rank the themes by importance. Displayed in Table 6 are the perceptions of the participants as to the importance of the three major themes of the central research question.

Table 6

Importance of Central Research Question Themes

Theme	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Planning	1	4	9
Data Collection	3	6	5
Self-assessing	10	4	0

Planning

Planning was identified as a major theme in this study within all the sources of data. Within the major theme of planning are the two subthemes of strategic planning and planning for school improvement. As noted in Table 4 and Table 5, planning was present in all the individual and embedded subunit focus group interviews conducted. Planning for an accreditation visit was discussed by participants as an important part of the accreditation process. Jane explained how she used the NSBECS in this initial accreditation planning process by identifying leaders in the school that could aid in accreditation preparation based upon the domains of the NSBECS. "I have identified a leadership team that will spearhead each of the domains, and then within those teams, those chairs are selecting staff that would be able to provide input into the various benchmarks depending on their strengths." This process at Holy Cross Catholic School aligns with the site visit timeline and the accreditation site visit overview documents. Within the site visit timeline, there are designated dates that serve as checkpoints months out from the accreditation visit that require school leadership to plan for the visit. This includes planning for self-study and ratings on the standards and benchmarks of the NSBECS. It is documented in the site visit overview that planning for legal compliance and form completion in addition to the self-study is an important part of the accreditation process using the NSBECS. These are planning elements that were in the early stages of the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. These early planning stages are where most of the work and diligent planning take place. According to Karen: "The majority of the heavy work comes during the self-study process, and you complete that self-study maybe a term prior to when the actual accreditation team comes to visit."

Planning for the site visit was also an important part of the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. As the accreditation site visit approaches, school leaders must work with the Catholic Schools Office and accreditation team chair to develop an accreditation visit agenda and schedule for the two-day accreditation visit, as well as prepare the school community for the visit. This is important for the accreditation team to get an authentic indication of the culture of the school as well as the strengths and areas for improvement. The planning that allows for this authentic look at the school involves interviews with stakeholders, observations, and discussions: "Our visit was comprised of a day where the team was here in the building, walking around, doing some observations, and then meeting together in a space where they could talk things over" (Gwen, Individual Interview). As Gwen explained, the planning throughout the accreditation process, including the elements of the accreditation site visit itself, is designed around the NSBECS.

Planning as a use of the NSBECS is not limited to the self-study or preparation for the accreditation visit. Planning occurs after accreditation as part of the improvement process for the schools studied in the Diocese of St. Xavier. As Justin commented: "We do have to figure out ways to utilize those standards and let those standards drive our decision making." Document analysis led to the furtherance of planning as one of the major themes in the central research question. Keywords in these documents include but are not limited to *strategic plan, prepare, ratings, benchmarks, professional development, opportunity, asset planning, plan for future, planning retreat experiences, and refine committees.*

Strategic Planning

A subtheme of the major theme of planning that emerged in the data is that of strategic planning. Strategic planning was an important part of the accreditation process and use of the

NSBECS in the Diocese of St. Xavier. According to Thomas, a strategic plan was developed for the Catholic Schools Office that was designed around the NSBECS:

> We created four areas of our strategic plan and two of the four are related to operational vitality, because we had so much work to do there. Which also helped us to really make progress in terms of enrollment, in terms of that business side of things just to get our schools in order in that sense. It's a constant. You're never done. We're not there, but I would just say these are just really helpful to us in our efforts to stay focused and get boards engaged in a way that's beyond their personal agenda, but in a way that keeps them focused on three to five years out.

Strategic planning was a required part of the accreditation process for the Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier. According to Elizabeth, strategic planning was part of the 5-year accreditation cycle in the diocese: "For our 5-year cycle, that next year becomes strategic planning, and then three years of implementation, and then deep dive into self-study, and then their next visit is approached."

Strategic plans from all three embedded subunits were provided by school leaders. Each of these strategic plans were different based upon the self-assessment and feedback from accreditation teams of the schools that stemmed from the accreditation process and site visit. According to the diocesan accreditation site visit timeline, the accreditation chair or co-chair meets with the principal 30 days after the accreditation visit. One of the questions that drives that discussion is "How might this trigger your strategic plan for the next five years?" The strategic plans of the embedded subunits studied encompass aspects of Catholicity; operational vitality, which includes marketing, communications, enrollment, and finance; and school improvement in academics and student performance. While leadership is not directly mentioned in the strategic

plans, there is a focus on strong leadership as the leaders in the schools are responsible for the implementation, measurement, and progress of the strategic plans. In the case of St. Andrew Catholic school, the school governing board was part of the leadership that was responsible for the strategic planning process. In the embedded subunit focus group interview with St. Andrew Catholic School, Bethany, the school board chair, noted: "We are just starting through a process of strategic planning, and the standards were really foundational for our work." Bethany went on to further explain the process of strategic planning at St. Andrew. She indicated that after the accreditation process, they would look at the areas of improvement and then conduct a SWOT analysis looking at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. That would then drive discussions and goals for planning for the future. James, in an individual interview, also commented on how he delineated responsibility of strategic planning to the school board at his Catholic school. When Gwen arrived at St. Andrew, there was no strategic plan. It was the accreditation process that was the impetus for strategic plan development and further school board involvement.

In the Operational Vitality domain of the NSBECS, financial plans are a required element in benchmarks 10.2, 10.3, 10.4, 10.6, and 10.8. Additionally, communications/marketing plans, enrollment management plans, and development plans are a required aspect of standard 13 (Ozar, Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). These were important elements of strategic plans in the Diocese of St. Xavier. As Elizabeth commented, "if you don't have your enrollment management in an actual written plan with projections, with outcomes, with goals, you cannot score well." Strategic plans shared by leadership from the embedded subunits address some of the plans in the NSBECS. St. Takeri school had every element listed above addressed in some fashion in the strategic plan. St. Andrew had goals in the strategic plan for all these elements as well. Holy

Cross Catholic School addressed financial planning, and communications/marketing plans as a part of their strategic plan. In addition, there was a commitment to the development of the facility at Holy Cross, which was slightly different than the other embedded subunits; there was not an enrollment management plan as part of the strategic plan. The scoring and ratings that are assessed during the self-study and the accreditation team visit are how school leaders identify the areas of growth that are implemented in the strategic plans.

Justin highlighted the importance of strategic planning: "Our strategic plan is up at the end of this year too, so we're in the process of doing a strategic plan, and that report is really going to guide our plan over the next 5 years." Strategic planning was an important part of the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Diocesan and school leaders allocated time for future planning within that accreditation process.

School Improvement

A second subtheme identified in the major theme of planning in this study was planning for school improvement. Continuous improvement in schools involves improvement of all aspects of a school (Leonard, Bourke, & Schofield, 2004). The use of the NSBECS in the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier aided school and diocesan leaders in planning for whole school improvement through the domain areas and the diversity of benchmarks that addressed the needs of Catholic schools. As Thomas noted:

> Whether I'm talking about Catholic identity and mission, I can empower those who are working on Catholic identity and mission with these benchmarks to really work toward and evaluate and I can empower the academic folks, the faculty, with these benchmarks and they can score those areas. I can give to the business office and the finance committees the operational vitality pieces. It just gets the whole community engaged in

way that everyone knows what we are working for and the standards that we are trying to

meet.

In the St. Takeri Catholic school focus group interview, Eric expressed a similar perspective on

the use of the NSBECS as the framework in the accreditation process addressing the whole

school. He acknowledged the support that he felt when looking at the big picture of St. Takeri

Catholic School. There was a focus on student assessment scores and teacher professional

development; however, the focus did not end there. The look at the whole school through the

lens and evaluation of the NSBECS through the accreditation process showed school leaders

what "functions well or doesn't function well, and where they really need to work." Several

interview participants noted the benchmarks of the NSBECS that indicated the need for quality

extra-curricular programs. Benchmark 9.3 of the NSBECS specifically addressed the

opportunities in extra-curricular programs that occur outside the classroom (Ozar, Weitzel-

O'Neill, 2012).

According to Antoniou et al. (2016) important areas for school improvement stem from a

school self-evaluation framework. School improvement planning in the Diocese of St. Xavier

begins with the self-study in the accreditation process. "The amount of time they spent in

studying themselves against rubrics and guidelines drove them to new places of excellence"

(Elizabeth, Individual Interview). One of the areas that Gwen explained as an important part of

planning for school improvement and growth was that of the clarity of the NSBECS in terms of

how Catholic schools could determine how to better meet the standards: "It shines a light, on the

areas where you need to grow, and it gives you very clear roadmaps for that growth and what

needs to improve for you to meet that standard in a better way." James provided an example:

For example, we got marked down for not using enough data in our PLC's and that is one

of the NSBECS standards, and that is now an area that we are working to improve in our

PLC's and using our standardized testing as well as other data points like our grades and

qualitative data that the teachers are bringing together to help student improvement.

The standard to which James referred was standard eight of the NSBECS. Benchmark 8.5

described the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a means for faculty

collaboration and the monitoring of individual and systemic student learning (Ozar, Weitzel-

O'Neill, 2012). James was provided valuable input for school improvement planning through the

evaluation of the accreditation visit. This input came through both the self-rating and the ratings

and scoring that were provided by the accreditation visit team. Thomas indicated the NSBECS as

the "driver of quality improvements" within the Diocese of St. Xavier.

Several participants noted the improvement that they felt from the NSBECS and the

accreditation process as teachers. According to Sally, "As a teacher, once you've done the deep

dive into it, you are a better teacher, because you are starting to see the kinds of things you

should be constantly not just documenting but doing." Rebecca also indicated that using the

NSBECS as a framework provided her a "place to move and grow from" and gave her a different

view of what she was doing in her classroom. Alice commented that this process helped teachers

in long-range planning of lessons. From the planning standpoint, Thomas recognized the

systemic consistency that the NSBECS provided teachers rather than planning in isolation. The

two domains of Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence provided the greatest planning

resources for teachers. Elizabeth commented that in the accreditation planning process, school

leaders would include teachers in the process of assessing domains one and three, which were the

Catholic Identity and Academic Excellence domains.

Data Collection

Data collection was identified as a second major theme of the central research question. This was identified through the 2nd cycle pattern coding process that led to the emergence of the theme. As indicated in Table 4 and Table 5, "data collection" was present within all embedded subunit focus group interviews and individual interviews except for Jane. In the St. Takeri focus group interview, Justin recognized the importance of data collection to measure the efficacy of school programming:

> We have to make sure that we are going to use those standards to measure ourselves and collect data on, and that was probably one of our weaknesses that was shared with us, is the data collection and data-driven procedures or processes that we should be utilizing as a school.

Data collection was an important concept for schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier as they planned for the accreditation process. Thomas, the Superintendent of the Diocese of St. Xavier, spoke of the objectivity of data collection on a set of standards, "it's given us a valid and reliable measure of those things that we can count on instead of how I feel about your Catholic identity, because I really resonate with the charisms that your school has put in place."

Data collection in the accreditation process involves ratings and scoring against the NSBECS with the evidence that supports that rating. Gwen explained in the St. Andrew focus group interview that the evidence gathered by school personnel and shared with the accreditation visit team throughout the process shows where that school is in scope of rating against the benchmarks of the NSBECS. She indicated that resources within the scoring rubrics of the NSBECS provide school leaders what evidence and data is needed to be considered a great school in those areas as well. Additional data collection sources (Appendix N) in the

accreditation process as noted by Elizabeth included various photos, which may include students

doing acts of service, students at retreat experiences, or volunteer moments by community

members; student writing samples, church bulletins, newsletters, notes from PLC's, financial

reports, budgets, facility plans, technology plans, strategic plans, and the cost to educate

students. These evidence sources stem from benchmarks in the 13 standards and four domains of

the NSBECS.

The theme of data collection was identified throughout site documents, including all three

strategic plans from the embedded subunits. Within these site documents, data collection was a

major theme in planning as a use of the NSBECS. This planning was both for accreditation visits

using the NSBECS and the collection of data at schools to drive school improvement. For

example, in the site document videos derived by the accreditation governing body, keywords

included *upload, evidence, historical data, track and monitor progress, importing,* and *legal

compliance.* These key words explain the use of the NSBECS in planning for an accreditation

visit. Keywords that surfaced within the schools' accreditation reports included but are not

limited to *measured by student learning, evaluate student work, document professional

collaboration, analyzing data, tied to instruction and data, assessment of students,* and *data

reporting.*

Self-assessing

The third theme that emerged within the central research question was self-assessing. As

part of the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier, schools were required to rate

themselves against the NSBECS as a self-study. "The whole process begins with the national

standards in that our self-study is based on those standards and giving ourselves a score based on

our observations and the things that we see going on in the classroom" (Gwen, Individual

Interview). Within the 5-year cycle of accreditation, school leaders and leadership teams conduct

a thorough self-study; however, they are required to review that self-study on an annual basis.

Elizabeth explained:

> Every single year their leadership team each spring has to assess their score according to
>
> the rubrics of the NSBECS in every benchmark. Knowing that many of those carry over
>
> from the previous year, many of the scores may be the same and the expectation is that
>
> they have adjusted scores, including evidence as attachments and narrative explanations
>
> of any changes.

It is documented within the site visit timeline that schools preparing for the accreditation visit

should have the self-study completed 60 days prior to their visit date.

Within the other documents collected, keywords of *evaluate, revision, and review*

showed the importance of self-assessing within the accreditation and school improvement

processes. In addition, accreditation reports from all three embedded subunits showed the self-

study, which was the self-assessment of the school against the NSBECS. These accreditation

reports showed the initial self-assessment of school personnel and committees on the

benchmarks, the accreditation team rating on the benchmarks, and a brief explanation of the

team's rating. When the team rating was different than the rating of the school, an explanation of

that difference was provided.

Within the three embedded subunits there were similarities and differences in how the

school leaders planned for self-assessing as part of the accreditation process. In both the St.

Andrew and Holy Cross interviews, Gwen and Jane both commented on putting together

accreditation teams that aided in the planning for the accreditation visit. Gwen spoke about

different committees and groups that helped in the self-assessment. She assigned different

domains to committees to conduct the self-ratings. Jane also commented in the individual interview on assigning groups, "I have identified a leadership team that will spearhead each of the domains, and then within those teams, those chairs are selecting staff that would be able to provide input into the various benchmarks depending on their strengths." Conversely, at St. Takeri Catholic School, the administration along with Eric, a teacher with extensive experience with accreditation, handled most of the planning aspects of the accreditation process, including most of the self-assessment piece. As seen in Table 5, self-assessing was present in two of the three subunit focus group interviews; additionally, self-assessing was present in all three embedded subunit accreditation reports.

Sub Question One

Research sub-question one for this study addressed how Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools. One major theme and three subthemes emerged in the data in this research sub question. The major theme is the influence of the NSBECS addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools. Within that major theme are the three subthemes of how the NSBECS are perceived by participants as influential in addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools, which are through marketing and enrollment, Catholic identity and Catholicity, and school boards and committees.

Influence Addressing the Uniqueness of Catholic Schools

The first research sub question addressed the influence of the NSBECS on school growth and continuous improvement in K-12 Catholic schools. Within the data, the major theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools emerged. Through the process of 1st cycle coding, the theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools surfaced in

the codes of *uniqueness of Catholic schools, influence on growth and continuous improvement, growing, NSBECS as influential, quality and excellence, enrollment,* and *2nd cycle changing.* These 1st cycle value and process codes led to the 2nd cycle pattern codes of *uniqueness of Catholic schools, school board/committees, enrollment,* and *school improvement.* As seen in Tables 4 and 5, the major theme of influence was evident in all individual and focus group interviews. Within the documents that were analyzed in this study, the major theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools surfaced through a variety of different keywords.

When asked about the influence of the NSBECS on school improvement, Elizabeth commented, "I think it gave us a benchmark and a level playing field to have conversations about school improvement in Catholic schools that don't compromise the unique culture or the concept of subsidiarity that our schools are rooted in." In the St. Takeri focus group interview, Emily shared a similar comment to Elizabeth, observing that the NSBECS provided different layers that helped school leaders create a successful Catholic school. These areas identified by Elizabeth and Emily were present throughout the documents collected and analyzed and led to the identification of the three subthemes of marketing and enrollment, Catholic identity and Catholicity, and school boards/committees. Through participation in the survey, participants shared their perceptions on the importance of the three subthemes within the major theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools. Those perceptions are highlighted in Table 7.

Table 7

Importance of Sub Question 1 Subthemes

Theme	1st Choice	2nd Choice	3rd Choice
Marketing/ enrollment	2	4	8

Catholic identity/ Catholicity	7	5	2
School boards/ committees	5	5	4

Marketing and Enrollment

The first subtheme in the major theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools is that of marketing and enrollment. Within the site documents, the keyword of marketing was used 12 times in some form. Marketing showed up with other terms such as *marketing coordinator, marketing plans, parish marketing program, student marketing, marketing committee, and marketing budget.* Within the site documents, the keyword of enrollment surfaced four times. Both the St. Takeri Catholic School and Holy Cross Catholic School's strategic plans included enrollment and marketing within the planning elements. In the St. Andrew Catholic School strategic plan, enrollment was not mentioned; however, *student marketing* surfaced as one of the keywords.

To determine whether marketing was an important keyword within the individual and focus group interviews, a keyword search was conducted of all interview documents of the word *marketing.* The keyword of *marketing* surfaced 17 times in the interviews. It was mentioned in four different individual interviews and two of the three embedded subunit focus group interviews. In the individual interview, Thomas contended that to have school growth, schools needed to be high quality schools and have excellent marketing efforts. According to Thomas, prospective families do not come to Catholic schools just because the schools are there, and the families do not assume that all the Catholic schools are high quality. There needs to be a process for ensuring that the school is operating with high quality and that the message of that quality gets out to the community through marketing efforts. According to James and Gwen, who were

both Catholic school principals who had been through the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier, the NSBECS have been influential in helping them to create marketing plans and work with other staff members to ensure that the school had a presence within the community.

A keyword search was conducted for the keyword *enrollment* within the individual and focus group interviews. The keyword of *enrollment* was mentioned 15 times across five different individual interviews. Elizabeth commented that when using the NSBECS to create the strategic plan for the Diocese of St. Xavier, they realized that they were not proficient in the area of enrollment management. Thomas echoed Elizabeth's comments regarding enrollment, "with our enrollment going in a negative direction for so many years, trying to keep schools vital and keep the vitality high was a huge challenge." It was using the NSBECS as the framework for strategic planning that drove their efforts in enrollment with the Catholic schools in the diocese. Thomas noted, "We've expanded the size of our office, and we are building to reach out to the community and make a difference in terms of enrollment." Jane also commented on redesigning the enrollment efforts at Holy Cross Catholic School to meet the needs of the community. The Holy Cross community was largely Hispanic, and Jane needed to intentionally plan her efforts to reach the needs of the community.

Catholic Identity and Catholicity

The second subtheme in the major theme of influence addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools was Catholic identity and Catholicity. A keyword search of the interview data and the term *Catholic identity* surfaced 29 times within six of the seven individual interviews. When speaking about the NSBECS, Thomas commented, "that's a critical piece, and without it, our schools would not have, I guess the impetus for change to really grow their Catholic identities." While the keywords of Catholic identity did not show up in the focus group

interviews verbatim, there were multiple references to the influence of the NSBECS on the Catholicity and Catholic culture of the embedded subunits. For example, Eric explained that the NSBECS were a much better fit for the accreditation process and school improvement efforts of St. Takeri Catholic School than the previous secular standards they were using prior to changing to the NSBECS. He also commented that the NSBECS addressed unique areas for improvement such as development, marketing, enrollment, facilities, religion programming, and Catholic cultural elements.

Throughout the documents collected from the bounded site of the Diocese of St. Xavier, the subtheme of influence through Catholic identity and Catholicity was present. Elements of Catholic identity surfaced within the documents of all three embedded subunits. This included both the accreditation reports and the strategic plans from the embedded subunits. Keywords that emerged in the St. Takeri accreditation report included: *Catechist certification, Catholic culture,* and *mission driven*. Keywords in the St. Andrew accreditation report included: *parent faith formation, formation of children,* and *faith formation programming.* Within the accreditation report of Holy Cross Catholic School, keywords included: *proclamation of faith, certified catechists, religious standards, lens of scripture, integration of Catholic social teaching, role models of faith,* and *canonical administrator.*

In addition to the accreditation reports, strategic plans developed for each of the three schools addressed Catholic identity and Catholicity. In the strategic plan of Holy Cross Catholic School, elements of the strategic plan that addressed Catholic identity included the specific area of Latino Catholicity. Given that the enrollment of Holy Cross included a high percentage of Latino students, this area was determined as important to include in the strategic planning process. In the strategic plan of St. Takeri Catholic School, there was a commitment to aid

students and families in the understanding and engagement of the Catholic Mass, as well as a plan to address vocations. The leadership of St. Andrew Catholic School included in their strategic plan elements of family Mass participation, communication of the school's mission, and demonstrated how the school's curriculum was embedded with a Catholic worldview.

School Boards and Committees

The third subtheme of the major theme of addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools that surfaced in the data was school boards and committees. The term *board* was used in all seven individual interviews and all three embedded subunit interviews and emerged 98 times within the different interviews. The term *committee* was used 23 different times in five of the seven individual interviews and all three embedded subunit focus group interviews. Of the 23 times that the term committee was used in the interviews, 17 were in relation to a school board or sub-function of a school board. Eric noted the influence of the NSBECS on the president of St. Takeri Catholic School in working with the finance committee: "Our president was able to use some of the standards and have some deep discussions with her finance committee. It has gotten us to see the whole picture of what we do as a school better than other standards." The school board at St. Takeri Catholic school was a board of limited jurisdiction. Gwen also commented on the influence of the NSBECS on working with school board committees. She indicated that after the accreditation visit, she was able to work with the school board chair and assign various improvement areas to different school board committees. Parish schools, such as St. Andrew and Holy Cross, had boards that were advisory in nature, as the pastor was the ultimate authority in ministries of the parish. In an individual interview, Thomas also commented on his ability to work with school/parish business offices and finance committees in the operational vitality standards of the NSBECS. Of the three embedded subunits studied, one principal of one of the

schools elicited school board involvement in the accreditation process. The other two embedded subunit leaders did not ask for board involvement in the accreditation process.

Within the documents collected in this study, there are multiple keywords that relate to school boards and committees. Those keywords include *board, school board, committees, diocesan school board, governing body, governance model, by-laws, finance committee, development committee, board evaluation, roster of board members, board minutes,* and *executive board.* Of the 11 documents collected in this study, nine of these documents contained one or more of the above stated keywords that related to school board and committees. In the accreditation reports of the embedded subunits, keywords relating to school boards and committees were present throughout the reports. This included narratives from school personnel or that of the accreditation site visit team. All three of the embedded subunit strategic plans contained elements of school board or committee involvement. Whether this was through goals within the strategic plan, or with whom the responsibility of the goals lies, board and/or committee involvement was present within the strategic plans of all three embedded subunits.

Sub Question Two

Research sub-question two explored the perceptions of Catholic school leaders on how the NSBECS could be improved to further influence school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic schools. Two themes of redundancy and differentiation emerged in the data in this research sub question. While all seven of the participants in the individual interviews suggested areas for improvement in the NSBECS, three of the seven indicated improvement needed in the area of redundancy and two of the seven indicated improvement needed in the area of differentiation (Table 4). In all three embedded subunit focus group interviews, participants shared differentiation as an area for improvement in the NSBECS, and in two of the three

embedded subunit focus group interviews, participants shared redundancy as an area of improvement (Table 5). Table 8 reflects the importance of these two themes as noted by the participants in the survey.

Table 8

Importance of Sub Question 2 Themes

Theme	1st Choice	2nd Choice
Redundancy	8	6
Differentiation	6	8

Redundancy

The first theme in sub question two was redundancy. Catholic school building leaders indicated that the NSBECS have multiple benchmarks that require the same evidence and explanations. Gwen explained, "I think there's a lot of overlap. I think there are areas where one standard might do to cover three different things, so Catholic Identity, it just kept coming up like that's the same as this one." Justin shared a similar perspective in the St. Takeri focus group interview. He contended that there was some crossover in certain areas of the NSBECS and that it would be helpful if there were more specific indications on what evidence and explanations could be provided. In the St. Andrew focus group interview, Karen and Madeline also shared that perspective. They both noted an overlap in some of the benchmarks of the NSBECS, and Karen shared the difficulty of an accreditation visiting team validating all the work on all the standards

in a visit. She suggested simplifying or "streamlining" the standards to allow for a more specific and thorough accreditation visit.

Within the embedded subunit accreditation reports there were areas of overlap. The keyword *repeated comments* surfaced in all three accreditation reports. In the accreditation reports, the accreditation site visit team had the opportunity to share narrative comments and explanations on the ratings for the individual schools. Within these comments and explanations in each of the three accreditation reports, the site visit teams shared similar comments in some cases and the same comments in other cases for multiple benchmarks and ratings. This occurred in the accreditation reports for all three embedded subunits.

Differentiation

The second theme in research sub question two of this study was differentiation. Participants in the study indicated the need for the NSBECS to differentiate between different types of schools. The main area of differentiation that emerged in the data was the grade levels of the schools. Catholic schools predominantly operate as elementary schools (some version of pre-K through 8th grade) and secondary schools with grades nine through 12. The perceptions of participants were that there can be revision in the NSBECS to differentiate the standards to better meet the needs of the different types of schools. Within the individual interviews, both Gwen and Eric noted that differentiation of the NSBECS between Catholic elementary schools and secondary schools would further the influence of the NSBECS. According to Gwen:

> The standards, to me, seem more reflective of a high school situation or an elementary or
>
> a preschool situation…I'm not sure you want to have separate standards, but you might

want to have them worded in different ways for a high school versus an elementary

school.

Eric shared a similar comment on how he perceived the NSBECS could be improved, "I think,

it's hard to apply all of them across every type of school, whether it be a parish school, a

diocesan school, an elementary school, an independent school, a high school, a K-12 school." He

added that there are differences between parish schools, diocesan schools, and independent

Catholic schools that can be reflected in changes to the NSBECS to better differentiate.

Differentiation between elementary and secondary schools was also discussed in all three

embedded subunit focus group interviews. Justin commented in the St. Takeri focus group

interview that they did not feel that they could grade themselves on some of the standards

because they were a diocesan school and did not have the same administrative structure. He

commented, "There were a couple of things where we just had to deal with the fact that we can't

even give ourselves a 1 on it, because there's just no way we'll ever be able to." Eric added, "I

think there's a difficulty when you try to do a standard that works for preschool through high

school." Specifically, Eric mentioned the benchmarks of the NSBECS that included pastor

involvement and noted that at St. Takeri Catholic School, because of their structure, did not have

a pastor, as they are not attached to a parish. In the Holy Cross Catholic School focus group

interview, Alex, who was new to the accreditation process and using the NSBECS, commented

on the benefits of differentiating the NSBECS according to grade level bands:

> The NSBECS apply to the K-8 as a whole, where a lot of schools, and what I would hope
>
> our schools eventually gets towards is a lot of grade band discussions in terms of how we
>
> are filtering information K-3, 3-5, 6-8, and being able to sit down and talk about those.

Alex went on to further explore the influence that this grade level differentiation could have for teachers on preparation, lesson planning, and instruction. In the St. Andrew focus group interview, Gwen expressed that she felt some of the benchmarks in the NSBECS were more applicable to a secondary school environment. This created "a little bit of stress and awkwardness" in the elementary school.

In the St. Takeri accreditation report, there was a specific example of the theme of differentiation. Standard 5.5 of the NSBECS indicated "the governing body, in collaboration with the leader/leadership team, maintains a relationship with the canonical administrator" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Under this benchmark, St. Takeri Catholic School received a rating of 1 from the accreditation team with the explanation "Not a parish school. This is a 1." St. Takeri Catholic School was a secondary, diocesan school that was not attached to a parish in the diocese. In the accreditation reports for the elementary parish schools, there were not examples of a lower rating due to the type of school; however, there were multiple examples of lower ratings from the accreditation teams that expressed "not enough evidence." As noted by Gwen, the difficulty of finding evidence in some cases can be attributed to the type of school.

Outlier Data and Findings

In this study exploring how Catholic school leaders use the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation, there was one outlier finding in the data. The outlier finding emerged within research sub question two. When exploring the perceptions of participants on how the NSBECS could be improved to better influence continuous improvement in Catholic schools, it was found that participants with varying roles within the Diocese of St. Xavier shared differences in their perceptions of how the NSBECS could be improved.

The theme of revision emerged in research sub question two. As indicated in Table 4 and Table 5, four of the seven participants in the individual interviews and participants in all three embedded subunit interviews commented on the need for revision in redundancy or differentiation within the NSBECS. The three participants that did not indicate redundancy or differentiation as needed revisions of the NSBECS were Thomas, Elizabeth, and Alice. The participants who indicated the need for revision of redundancy or differentiation served in building-level leadership positions as principals or teacher leaders. There was a difference in the perceptions of what revisions could be made to the NSBECS to further the influence of school improvement on Catholic K-12 schools between Catholic diocesan leaders and Catholic building-level school leaders.

Thomas, Elizabeth, and Alice provided possible revisions to the NSBECS at a more systemic level. Thomas indicated the need for better meeting the needs of all family members and the anthropology of the human person. Elizabeth thought that the standards and accreditation reports were overly detailed and could use a summary piece to help non-educators better understand the school strengths and areas for improvement. She also commented that the NSBECS could be improved to show the vertical alignment of benchmarks, standards, and domains. Alice felt that there were not specific questions regarding overall assessment scores and that the NSBECS could be updated to better reflect the current uses of technology as it relates to marketing.

As indicated above, the building-level school leaders who participated in this study felt strongly that the revisions of the NSBECS that were needed were to limit the redundancy in the standards and benchmarks and to differentiate the standards between the different types of Catholic schools. These revisions were practical considerations that could assist building-level

leaders with their experiences using the NSBECS in the accreditation process. When compared

with the three participants who were diocesan leaders, there was a difference in how the

NSBECS were viewed within the context of school improvement by building-level Catholic

school leaders. Diocesan leaders viewed change in the NSBECS more globally and systemic,

while building-level leaders saw a more practical application to revision in the NSBECS.

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Planning, data collection, and self-assessing are important uses of the NSBECS in the

accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Study participants rated self-assessing as the

most important of these uses as evidenced by their experiences. The major influence of the

NSBECS on school growth and continuous improvement is how the NSBECS addresses the

uniqueness of Catholic schools. The areas of marketing and enrollment, Catholic identity and

Catholicity, and school boards and committees are unique to Catholic schools. These areas are

addressed by multiple domains, standards, and benchmarks in the NSBECS and were deemed by

participants as influential in school improvement efforts through the accreditation process. To

better influence school growth and continuous improvement, the NSBECS could be revised to

reduce redundancy and better differentiate between the different types of Catholic schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how Catholic school leaders use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) as a framework for accreditation. The central research question and two research sub questions were designed to understand the uses of the NSBECS within the accreditation process to further school growth and continuous improvement, as well as explore the perceptions of Catholic school leaders as to the influence of the NSBECS and how the NSBECS could be improved to further influence overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools. This chapter begins with a discussion and highlights important findings in the study. This occurs through a summary of the thematic findings and interpretations of the researcher. After the interpretations come the implications for policy and practice, which include recommendations for stakeholders based upon the study data. Remaining discussion topics include theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

In this study exploring how Catholic school leaders use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) as a framework for accreditation, six major themes were identified that answer the central and two research sub questions. These themes highlight the findings from this study, and the sections of discussion that follow show the relationship of these findings to previous research as well as novel research of this study. In addition, this discussion expands on the theoretical framework of routinized action theory (March & Simon, 1958).

Interpretation of Findings

This section includes a summary of the themes explored in the previous chapter and discussion of important findings from the study. The interpretations include the uniqueness of Catholic schools, the reflective practice, and the inclusion of stakeholders in the accreditation process of Catholic schools using the NSBECS.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Through a two-cycle coding approach, themes in the data were developed. These themes were organized around the central research questions and two research sub questions. The themes of planning, data collection, and self-assessing were identified within the central question of exploring the uses of the NSBECS in the accreditation process. Through the survey administered, participants indicated that self-assessing was the most important theme in the central research question. School leaders and staff self-assessed against the NSBECS on an annual basis in the Diocese of St. Xavier. To prepare for an accreditation visit, an extensive self-assessment was completed; in the interim years, school staff self-assessed to determine if there were areas of growth and improvement that affected the school's ratings. The self-assessment process during the 5-year cycle was described by participants as a tremendous amount of work. The theme of self-assessment marries with the theme of data collection.

During the self-assessment process, school leaders and staff collected data and evidence that supported the rating that they gave themselves on all 70 benchmarks of the NSBECS. In addition to the self-study, data was collected annually to aid in the continuous improvement process as school leaders aimed to improve on areas in need of growth. Data collection sources aligned with the four domains of Catholic identity, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational vitality within the NSBECS.

Planning was an important aspect of the use of the NSBECS in the accreditation process. School leaders planned in multiple ways prior to their accreditation visits. Two of the three principals of the schools studied planned for the self-study assessment by including stakeholders that included administration, faculty, and board members in the process of self-assessing and collecting data. After the accreditation visit, school leaders identified areas in need of improvement and growth. The planning process for continuous improvement took precedence at this point. First, school leaders had to identify how to prioritize the areas that were in most need of improvement. Once those areas were identified, continuous improvement planning and strategic planning took place. As part of the accreditation process in the diocese of St. Xavier, schools were required to conduct an annual self-study to determine if the programming and improvement efforts were effective. The annual self-study was a way of formatively assessing the planning and improvement efforts of the schools, which was consistent with research on school improvement (Ozar et al., 2015). Planning was part of the structure of how the Diocese of St. Xavier ensured accountability for improvement, which supported research by Leonard et al. (2004) regarding accountability and a "framework to enact the improvement process" (p. 7).

Within research sub question two, one major theme and three subthemes were identified. The major theme identified was addressing the influence of Catholic schools. The NSBECS were influential in the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. It was through the three subthemes where this influence was predominant. The Catholic identity and Catholicity of the schools was an area of great importance to school and diocesan educational leaders. Bellei et al. (2019) contended that longevity in the effectiveness in schools is furthered by school culture. One of the determining factors of the culture of a school is the values that are important to the school (Bellei et al., 2019). Catholic values are critical to the culture in Catholic schools. The

NSBECS are designed with a Catholic worldview throughout the four domains. Domain two of the NSBECS is governance and leadership. Catholic school principals are not only instructional leaders in their schools, but also spiritual leaders (Holter & Frabutt, 2013). School administrators impact the culture of the school (Ali, 2017), and accreditation standards should include the evaluation of school leadership (Boyle, Haller, & Hunt, 2016; Torsak et al., 2019). In the Diocese of St. Xavier, Catholic school administrators used the benchmarks in domain two of the NSBECS in the process of accreditation and school improvement to measure the efficacy of school leadership.

In addition to Catholic identity, the other subthemes that were identified in the data sources were marketing and enrollment and school boards and committees. Participants shared experiences and the influence of the NSBECS in the accreditation process in these areas. Marketing and enrollment were strategic priorities for the entire diocese. School boards and committees were involved in the accreditation process in one of the three embedded subunits and heavily involved in the strategic planning process for all three embedded subunits.

Research sub question two was designed to garner the perceptions of participants as to the main areas of improvement of the NSBECS to better influence school growth and continuous improvement. The two themes of redundancy and differentiation were identified within this research sub question. Multiple participants indicated that there was overlap in some of the benchmarks in the NSBECS. They looked for the same evidence and received similar feedback on accreditation visits for these benchmarks. Document analysis of accreditation reports indicated similar narratives on some of the benchmarks. In addition to redundancy, differentiation also surfaced as a major theme. Participants who served in Catholic elementary schools felt that some of the benchmarks in the NSBECS were more applicable to secondary

schools, and vice versa for participants who were secondary school leaders. Multiple participants felt that the NSBECS could use revision to differentiate between the different types of Catholic schools. Isomorphism could occur if there was not differentiation that allowed schools to change in different ways in the accreditation process (Cheng, 2015).

Uniqueness. Culture in Catholic schools is unique. Catholic school leaders must deliver an excellent education to students and support families in that endeavor while maintaining a distinct Catholic identity and form students in the Catholic faith. The importance of school improvement in education is widely acknowledged in research; Leonard, Burke, and Schofield (2004) contend that school improvement occurs through the systemic lens of whole school improvement. In Catholic schools, whole school improvement requires school leaders to consider a wide range of areas important to the success of the whole school. In Catholic schools, this begins with the culture and integration of the Catholic faith throughout the programming of the school. Parents send their children to Catholic schools for the excellence in education and the formation of their Children in the Catholic tradition (Maney et al., 2017). A Catholic worldview permeates all four domains and 13 benchmarks throughout the NSBECS. As Gwen noted, a Catholic culture in a school is not just teaching religion courses or having religion instruction. It is "meeting them with their faith and with their Catholic values in every turn." The consideration of Catholic tradition and culture within the context of school improvement is an important aspect of accreditation in Catholic schools.

Catholic schools are not taxpayer funded. Revenue sources and proper financial planning are critical elements that must be considered for Catholic schools to remain sustainable and viable. Standards 10 and 13 in the operational vitality domain address these critical and unique elements for Catholic schools. Finances and financial planning are covered in standard 10 of the

NSBECS. These eight benchmarks provide Catholic school leaders and governing body

members a framework for addressing the unique needs of Catholic schools that can be a primary

part of the continuous improvement efforts through the accreditation process using the NSBECS.

In the Diocese of St. Xavier, these elements were not only addressed through the rating process

in accreditation, but they were also part of the strategic planning process. All three schools in this

study had elements of financial planning as a part of their strategic plans. Through the

accreditation process, Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier recognized the

importance of financial planning as a part of planning for future viability.

Standard 13 of the NSBECS contains benchmarks that address the unique nature of

Catholic schools through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and

development. The education landscape in the United States is competitive; marketing is an

important element for Catholic school leaders (Poole & Campos, 2016). The benchmarks in this

domain indicate the need for Catholic schools to have plans in all these areas. Elizabeth

explained that within the accreditation process of the Diocese of St. Xavier, schools could not

score well on a rating system if they did not have formal plans for these areas. If those schools

did not score well on these benchmarks, they could set those areas as a priority in their

continuous improvement processes. As a Catholic school principal, Justin commented on how

having these plans in the benchmarks helped him and his team set goals in these areas.

Routinized action theory posits that organizations change through multiple iterations of normal

routines (March & Simon, 1958). These normal routines occur through the accreditation process.

In the Diocese of St. Xavier, schools conducted a comprehensive self-study prior to an

accreditation visit; they also conducted a less comprehensive self-rating on an annual basis.

These multiple iterations of self-evaluating allow for the change process to take place. According

to Cheng (2015), isomorphism is when organizations go through a process of change in which they become similar due to changing to the standards by which they evaluate themselves. When the change response does not align with the mission or culture of the institution, isomorphism is more likely (Cheng, 2015). Using standards that are specific to the mission of Catholic education, Catholic schools are less likely to experience isomorphism. What is important in Catholic education, is that these changes that occur through the normal routines of accreditation have a specific Catholic focus.

Reflection. Reflection was an important part of the accreditation process in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Catholic school principals reflected at the outset of the process. Through this reflection, they determined which stakeholders to include in the accreditation process. In the case of St. Andrew and Holy Cross Catholic Schools, Gwen and Jane reflected and made the determination to include faculty members as part of the accreditation team at their respective schools. In addition to members of the faculty, Gwen also included the school board chair as a member of the school's accreditation team. At St. Takeri Catholic school, Justin relied on the president of the school and Eric, a teacher with years of accreditation experience. While the accreditation teams varied at different Catholic schools, there was reflection on how to best go through the accreditation process. These teams then lead the school through the self-study process. Part of the normal routine of accreditation is a self-evaluation process (Enomoto & Conley, 2012; Bose et al., 2017). As a part of the self-study in the Diocese of St. Xavier, Catholic school leaders gathered evidence as well as data and reflected on a rating according to the NSBECS. Gwen explained the importance of an honest approach to that reflection. She indicated that prior to her time at St. Andrew, the reflection on the ratings according to the NSBECS was not present. Ratings were often similar to prior years without the reflective

responses to the ratings. Gwen commented that this did not allow for the continuous improvement that the process could generate. This aligns with the findings from Tavares et al. (2016) that reflection added to quality assurance measures positively affects teaching and learning.

Reflection after normal routines is the impetus for change within the organization (March & Simon, 1958). After the self-study, Catholic school leaders then reflected on their scores and ratings to plan for continuous improvement. That continuous improvement planning happens through improvement plans and strategic plans developed as part of that reflective practice. The strategic plans from all three embedded subunits reflected the areas for improvement that were part of their respective accreditation reports. Through each iteration of the self-study and accreditation processes, Catholic school leaders continued to reflect on their ratings and evaluated their improvement efforts. Elizabeth commented on how Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier saw their school historically through the multiple iterations of the self-study process. She noted that this process "drove them to new places of excellence."

Inclusive. The process of accreditation using the NSBECS and the subsequent school improvement and strategic planning efforts that stem from accreditation include multiple stakeholder groups within Catholic school communities. Part of an effective quality assurance practice is the inclusion and participation of stakeholders (Tavares et al., 2016). All three schools included both administrators and teachers in the accreditation planning process. These schools included additional staff members through the self-study process. The self-study is a standard practice in accreditation in K-12 schools (US Department of Education, 2020). In the case of St. Andrew Catholic School, the school board chair was included on the school's accreditation team and was highly involved in the self-study. Each of the three schools included members of the

school board in the strategic planning process. In the case of St. Takeri Catholic School, the feedback from the accreditation process aided the president in having important planning discussions with the finance committee. This planning allowed the president to better align the work of the finance committee with the benchmarks of the NSBECS and move their efforts in a better direction to help the school. Benchmarks in the NSBECS address the inclusion of the bishop, pastors, board members and committee members, community partners, leadership team (administration), staff, faculty, parents, students, and alumni(ae) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). In addition to the community stakeholders directly stated in the NSBECS, opportunities for service by students further the reach of the Catholic school to outside groups. The inclusion of all these stakeholder groups allows for a greater scope of feedback that can help the school with improvement efforts and organizational change, as well as keep the consistency of the normal routine of accreditation, extending the research by Enomoto and Conley (2014), who found that "involving stakeholders in school improvement could be used to lever fundamental change" (p. 90). Normal routines need to stay in place during times of staff turnover and change (Enomoto & Conley, 2014), and the consistency in these routines over time allow for a greater opportunity for change in the institution (Askell-Williams & Koh, 2020). The inclusion of more stakeholders can keep the normal routines of accreditation and school improvement efforts in place. The consistency in normal routines and the scope of feedback that stems from those routines increases the opportunities for school leader reflection on the organizational routines, which provides an avenue for change within the organization (March & Simon, 1958).

Implications for Practice

This study provides insight into the accreditation practices for Catholic dioceses and Catholic schools. There are implications for practice for various groups, including national

Catholic education leaders, secular accrediting agencies, diocesan education leaders, and local Catholic school administrators.

National Implications

Catholic diocesan educational leaders make decisions on what organizations they partner with to conduct their accreditation. These accreditors come with their own set of accreditation standards. There are multiple implications for practice as it relates to accrediting agencies and the use of the NSBECS as accreditation standards for Catholic schools. One of those implications is for the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA). Currently, the NSBECS are governed by NCEA. At the time of this study, NCEA was not a formal accreditor for Catholic schools in the United States. NCEA may consider becoming an accreditor to provide an option for Catholic schools in the United States to conduct their accreditation and school improvement efforts with the NSBECS serving as the framework and guiding standards. Providing this option to Catholic schools may increase the number of schools that use the NSBECS as their standards for accreditation. The NSBECS addressed the uniqueness of Catholic schools through the process of accreditation in the Diocese of St. Xavier. The use of the NSBECS may also address the uniqueness of Catholic schools across the United States. This can aid Catholic school leaders and stakeholders in their school improvement efforts that can influence the growth of the whole school, which in a Catholic school includes Catholic identity and culture, as well as the unique governance and viability aspects of Catholic schools.

In addition to the consideration of becoming a formal accrediting agency, national Catholic leaders may consider practical revisions of the NSBECS. Catholic school leaders in the diocese of St. Xavier indicated improvements that could be made to the NSBECS to further influence school growth in Catholic schools through the accreditation process. Leadership at

NCEA might consider revision to the NSBECS to reduce redundancy in some of the benchmarks. There are some benchmarks that can be consolidated that would alleviate the need for school administrators to provide redundant evidence in the accreditation process. Benchmarks 2.7, 3.3 and 3.4 reference social justice in the school's curriculum, student participation, and through experiencing role models. These benchmarks could be consolidated as each is related to areas of social justice and the student experience. Benchmarks 3.2 and 4.1 relate to retreats and other spiritual experiences for students and staff respectively. While these benchmarks separate the experience for students and staff, considerations for revision and consolidation might be made to reduce redundancy as each benchmark references retreats and other spiritual experiences. NCEA leadership might also consider revisions to the NSBECS to differentiate benchmarks according to types of Catholic schools, such as elementary, secondary, parish, and diocesan schools. Parish schools operate with the pastor as the ultimate authority in the parish. Within parish Catholic school models, there are differences in funding models as well. Parish schools could be tuition based or tithing based. Benchmarks 10.6 and 10.7 specifically reference tuition and tuition assistance respectively. Tithing school models may benefit from differentiation in these benchmarks. Diocesan schools typically do not have a pastor, as they are not attached to a specific parish. Many diocesan schools operate with a president/principal model. Benchmarks that address these specific areas of governance may be beneficial to Catholic school leaders. Elementary and secondary schools are very different as well. There are curricular, instructional, leadership, and cultural differences in how these schools operate. Differentiation in the standards might allow for more specific direction for school leadership.

Another implication for practice relates to the secular accreditors that partner with Catholic schools across the United States. The four major accreditors for K-12 schools in the United States are Cognia (formerly AdvancED), the Middle Sates Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS), the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) (Oldham, 2018). Given the uniqueness of Catholic education, providing Catholic schools with an avenue to use the NSBECS for accreditation may give these accrediting organizations better opportunities to help Catholic schools address the continuous improvement of the whole school.

Diocesan Implications

The two main types of accreditations are specialized accreditation, which is the evaluation of a specific program, and regional accreditation, which is the systemic accreditation of an institution (Makhoul, 2019; US Department of Education, 2020). The Diocese of St. Xavier participated in regional accreditation through their state non-public association. The regional accreditation in the Diocese of St. Xavier was a systemic accreditation effort that was led by the diocesan Catholic schools office. The use of the NSBECS as the standards for accreditation and the specific accreditation protocols were decided at the diocesan level. The use of the NSBECS as the standards for accreditation may be an implication for practice for diocesan education leaders. Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier indicated the NSBECS as influential in the areas of Catholic identity, school boards and committees, and marketing and enrollment. Other Catholic school leaders may find that the same levels of influence through using the NSBECS in the accreditation process in their respective schools. Diocesan education leaders might consider using the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation in their Catholic dioceses.

Local School Implications

The perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS from Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier were that the NSBECS address the uniqueness of Catholic schools in the areas of Catholic identity, marketing and enrollment, and school boards and committees. Multiple participants indicated the influence of the NSBECS on the Catholic identity and Catholicity of their local Catholic schools. In addition, the influence of the NSBECS spanned to the sustainability and future operations of Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier through marketing and enrollment and the inclusion of school boards and committees in strategic planning efforts. These two areas are often related in Catholic schools. School boards and committees are often comprised of community members that have various skills in the areas of finance, marketing, and business operations. These skills aid Catholic school leaders in sustainability efforts and best practices in finance. The implication for local Catholic school leaders is to include these members of the community in the operations and discussions on sustainability in their Catholic schools. The principals of the schools in this study included members of the community either in the accreditation process or in the strategic planning efforts. These were seen as influential practices in using the NSBECS in the context of continuous improvement in Catholic schools. Catholic school principals throughout the United States may also find this influence in their use of the NSBECS by including school boards and committees as they focus on marketing and enrollment efforts.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Routinized action theory posits that organizations and institutions change through multiple iterations of normal organizational routines (March & Simon, 1958). Accreditation is a normal routine for Catholic K-12 schools. Within the Diocese of St. Xavier, the normal process of accreditation and multiple iterations of the routines that existed in their accreditation processes

created positive school change. While schools went through the full accreditation visit every five years, part of the process of using the NSBECS in accreditation in the Diocese of St. Xavier was an annual self-study. This annual self-study fostered reflection on the part of the local Catholic school administration and staff. Changes in organizations occur when individuals reflect on the normal organizational routines (March & Simon, 1958). While personnel changes in schools, routines continue as part of the normal operations within schools (Enomoto & Conley, 2014). Jane commented in the embedded subunit focus group interview that Holy Cross Catholic school experienced a great deal of turnover in the staff. That turnover can create stagnation in school improvement efforts. As Jane commented, "it's hard to have those conversations when people know nothing about your school." Regarding consistency in routines, Rebecca noted, "if you were to go to any other Catholic school now knowing the NSBECS, you should be able to start picking out parts of those domains or seeing that evidence in that school culture, curriculum, in expectations." This study extends routinized action theory developed by March and Simon (1958) and the research by Enomoto and Conley (2014) regarding the theory in the context of accreditation in educational settings.

This study extends research on school culture and continuous improvement and furthers research on the influence of the NSBECS on the unique aspects of Catholic schools. According to Ozar et al. (2015), school improvement is a formative process, which is different from the summative nature of school effectiveness. Continuous improvement in schools involves the growth of the whole school (Leonard, Brouke, & Schofield, 2004). This study extends this research to Catholic schools in the context of school improvement through the accreditation process using the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation. Schools in the Diocese of St. Xavier conducted an annual self-study on the standards of the NSBECS, which was a formative

process of reflection and determining the efficacy of their school improvement priorities. The Catholic school leaders who conducted this self-study did so with fidelity to the entirety of the NSBECS. The four domains of the NSBECS addressed the whole Catholic school through Catholic identity and culture, governance and leadership, academic excellence, and operational components.

Marketing has become a critical component for Catholic school leaders as parents are becoming more informed and the competitive nature of education in the United States has increased (Poole & Campos, 2016). As Catholic schools are not taxpayer funded, tuition and stewardship are critical components to the sustainability of Catholic schools. One of the themes identified in this study was that the NSBECS address the uniqueness of Catholic schools, which included the subtheme of the influence of the NSBECS on marketing and enrollment. Goldschmidt and Walsh (2013) explained that new governance models have been created in Catholic K-12 schools to combat the recent decline in enrollment. School boards are often comprised of community members that have a specific knowledge base or skill set that can help Catholic school leadership in operational vitality. Within domain four of the NSBECS, benchmarks address finance, budget, facilities and equipment, communications and marketing, enrollment management, and development and advancement (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012). Members of school boards and committees often have the knowledge base in these specific areas. This helps Catholic school leaders place more emphasis on sustainability and viability in Catholic schools.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of this study include the choice of the site and the specific requirement of participation in the study. Binding this case study to one Catholic diocese in the Midwest created

a specific participant pool with similar experiences in accreditation, whereas the choice of a multiple-case study or a case study in which multiple dioceses were studied may have provided participants with varying experiences in accreditation using the NSBECS. The participants in this study were all from the Diocese of St. Xavier, which had specific practices and protocols for accreditation. This study was further delimited by the choice of a site that used the NSBECS as the sole standards for accreditation. There are many other dioceses that use the NSBECS in addition to secular accreditation standards as part of their accreditation protocols. The sample of participants further delimited this study as all participants were required to have experience with both the NSBECS and accreditation processes. This delimited the perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on a broad spectrum of Catholic school educators.

This study was limited by the educators in the Diocese of St. Xavier who volunteered to participate. All 15 of the participants in this study were White, and 13 of the 15 participants in the study identified as non-Hispanic. Only two of the participants identified as White, Hispanic. While the delimitations and limitations of this study reduce transferability, the schools studied as embedded subunits may increase transferability. Embedded subunits in this study include two different K-8 elementary schools that served two different populations. Holy Cross Catholic School served a Latino population that included multiple parishes within a region. St. Andrew Catholic School was a K-8 parish elementary school, which was a traditional Catholic parish school model. St. Takeri School was a diocesan secondary school that operated with a president/principal model. The different schools studied may increase the transferability to other Catholic schools in the United States.

Recommendations for Future Research

The novel nature of the NSBECS has not allowed for a wide range of empirical studies. This study furthers the empirical research on the NSBECS in the context of school improvement and accreditation; however, this study was delimited to dioceses that use the NSBECS as the sole set of standards for accreditation and further delimited to a case study of one diocese. This study was also delimited by the sample pool of participants, as all the participants in this study experienced the same processes for accreditation. It is recommended that further research conducted on the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation include a multiple case study approach in which different dioceses are studied, allowing for the inclusion of participants who experience varying processes for accreditation. Another recommendation for future research is to include dioceses in which the NSBECS are used in the accreditation process yet are not the sole standards used in that process. This may provide different perspectives to how the NSBECS can be used in accreditation. This may allow for further transferability for Catholic educators that partner with secular accreditors. In addition to a multiple case study approach, it is recommended that further research be conducted with a phenomenological method. This design provides a methodology for understanding the lived experiences of individuals who use the NSBECS for accreditation and school improvement. Future research can include additional data on the influence of the NSBECS on specific academic factors and student learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to explore how the NSBECS are used as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools. The bounded case for this study was the Diocese of St. Xavier located in the Midwest region of the United States. Fifteen Catholic educators in the diocese of St. Xavier consented to participate in the study. Individual interviews with Catholic school teachers ($n = 1$), administrators ($n = 3$), diocesan education

leaders ($n = 3$); embedded subunit focus group interviews consisting of three teachers and the principal of a K-8 elementary school which served Latino families, two teachers, the principal, and the board chair of a K-8 elementary school, and two teachers and the principal of a secondary school which served grades 9-12; documents from the bounded site and embedded subunits, and a participant survey constituted the data that was collected and analyzed. A two-cycle coding approach consisting of values coding, process coding, and pattern coding was utilized. The themes identified in the data were organized through the central research question exploring how Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation, with research sub question one exploring how Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on continuous improvement in K-12 Catholic schools, and research sub question two exploring the perceptions of the participants on how the NSBECS can improved to further influence continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools. Themes included planning, data collection, self-assessing, influence, redundancy, and differentiation. Through the analysis of the themes in the study, three significant findings surfaced. These findings were the uniqueness of Catholic schools, reflection, and inclusion. Through the accreditation process, the NSBECS are influential in addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools. Through reflective practice and the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups using the NSBECS as the framework for accreditation, Catholic K-12 educators can address the unique aspects of Catholic schools in school improvement processes.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION REQUEST

To: [Potential Participant]
From: Andrew M. Kremer: Doctoral candidate at Liberty University
Subject: A qualitative case study to explore how Catholic school leaders use
             the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools

Body: Dear Catholic School Leader:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The title of my research project is Exploring how Catholic School Leaders Use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) as a Framework for Accreditation: A Single Case Study. The purpose of my research is to explore how the NSBECS are used in accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools and discover Catholic school leaders' perceptions of the influence of the NSBECS on Catholic school improvement, as well as their perceptions on the efficacy of the NSBECS in the areas of culture, leadership, performance, and sustainability.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in the Diocese of St. Xavier. I will seek Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval at Liberty University, which is contingent on site approval.

I will invite Catholic school leaders from the Office of Catholic Schools as well as individual school principals and teachers to participate in my research study. Participants will be asked to participate in individual interviews and/or focus group interviews and provide relevant documents. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating, and I will not contact any potential participants until I receive IRB approval for my study. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval that can be emailed to my email address.

Sincerely,

Andrew M. Kremer
Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University
████████████████

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL NOTIFICATION EMAIL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

May 19, 2021

Andrew Kremer
Lucinda Spaulding

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-792 Exploring How Catholic School Leaders Use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools as a Framework for Accreditation: A Single Case Study

Dear Andrew Kremer, Lucinda Spaulding:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether

possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at ████████.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Potential Participant]
From: Andrew M. Kremer: Doctoral candidate at Liberty University
Subject: A qualitative case study to explore how Catholic school leaders use
            the NSBECS as a framework for accreditation in Catholic K-12 schools

Body: Dear Catholic School Leader:

            As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am
            conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Philosophy
            degree. The purpose of my research is to explore how Catholic school leaders use
            the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools
            (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation,
            and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

            You were identified by the Office of Catholic Schools in your diocese or another
            participant as someone who meets the criteria for my study. Participants must be
            18 years of age or older and have experience using the NSBECS for accreditation
            in Catholic schools. Participants, if willing, will be asked to engage in individual
            or focus group interviews and provide relevant documents/documentation that is
            not confidential in nature. Interviews will last one to two hours and will be
            recorded. Participants will be asked to conduct member checking for accuracy of
            data collection. Participation will be voluntary and completely anonymous, and no
            personal, identifying information will be collected.

            A consent document is attached to this email. It contains additional information
            about my research. If you are willing to participate, please complete the attached
            consent document and contact me directly at akremer2@liberty.edu.

            Sincerely,

            Andrew M. Kremer
            Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University
            ███████████████

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Exploring How Catholic School Leaders Use the NSBECS as a Framework for Accreditation: A Single Case Study
Principal Investigator: Andrew Kremer, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a professional educator holding, or having previously held, the position of Superintendent, Associate/Assistant Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal, or Teacher at a Catholic diocese or Catholic K-12 school in the Catholic Diocese of St. Xavier (pseudonym) and have experience using the NSBECS for accreditation and/or school improvement. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this qualitative single case study is to explore how Catholic school leaders use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools (NSBECS) to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation. For this study, the NSBECS are defined as the set of standards that guide schools in continuous improvement in the accreditation process.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Share any documents that are applicable to the study that are not confidential in nature. The information from these documents will be used in the study but will not reveal any individual names or schools in any way.
2. Participate in focus group interview(s). Each focus group interview will be one hour and will be audio or video recorded and transcribed at a later time by the researcher.
3. Participate in individual interview(s) if invited. Each interview will be one hour and will be audio or video recorded and transcribed at a later time by the researcher.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping school and diocesan leaders as they plan for using standards that will help them work toward continuous improvement in the accreditation process.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Because this study involves K-12 education, information may be shared that could potentially trigger mandatory reporting requirements for the researcher. The researcher is bound to report any indications of child abuse, child neglect, or intent to harm self or others.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password protected computer to which only the researcher will have access. Data collected may be used in future presentations; however, the confidentiality of the participants will remain intact. All electronic records will be deleted three years after the conclusion of the study.
- Audio and video recordings from interviews will be transcribed. Recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password protected computer to which only the researcher will have access. Audio and video files and written transcriptions will be deleted three years after the conclusion of the study.
- The researcher will take precautions to ensure confidentiality; however, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. (Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.)

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Andrew Kremer. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ███████████████
You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, at
███████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Your Consent

By clicking the link below and giving consent, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after reviewing this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers (if applicable).

If you choose to participate in this study, please follow the link below to fill out the introductory questionnaire and provide your consent.

Introductory Questionnaire and Consent

APPENDIX E: CONSENT AND INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONNAIRE

Consent

1. I have read and understood the information provided in the consent form and consent to participate in the study.

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

2. The researcher has my permission to audio and/or video record me as part of my participation in this study.

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

Demographic Information

3. Race

    ☐ American Indian

    ☐ Native Alaskan

    ☐ Asian

    ☐ Black

    ☐ Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

    ☐ White

    ☐ Two or more races

    ☐ Prefer not to answer

4. Ethnicity

    ☐ Hispanic

    ☐ Non-hispanic

    ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. Age

☐ Under 30

☐ 31-40

☐ 41-50

☐ 51-60

☐ Over 60

NSBECS Experience

I feel confident in my understanding and use of the NSBECS for school improvement and accreditation.

1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

APPENDIX F: IRB MODIFICATION APPROVAL EMAIL

[External] IRB-FY20-21-792 - Modification: Modification
do-not-reply@cayuse.com <▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮>
Mon 12/6/2021 3:29 PM
To: Kremer, Andrew <▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮>; Spaulding, Lucinda S (School of Education)
<▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮>

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 6, 2021

Andrew Kremer
Lucinda Spaulding

Re: Modification - IRB-FY20-21-792 Exploring How Catholic School Leaders Use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools as a Framework for Accreditation: A Single Case Study

Dear Andrew Kremer, Lucinda Spaulding,

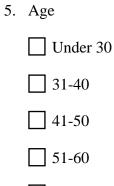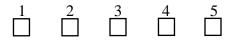The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has rendered the decision below for IRB-FY20-21-792 Exploring How Catholic School Leaders Use the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools as a Framework for Accreditation: A Single Case Study.

Decision: Exempt - Limited IRB

Your request "to introduce an additional survey to participants" as "a form of member checking on the themes that emerged in the data from the study" and "to gain further insight into the data provided by participants" has been approved. Thank you for submitting your revised consent form for our review and documentation. Your revised, stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study in Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for complying with the IRB's requirements for making changes to your approved study. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

We wish you well as you continue with your research.

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE RESEARCHER MEMOS

Sample #1

Methods section updated to reflect the changes in data collection and analysis of embedded case study approach.

Sample #2

Today I began the process of coding my first individual interview. I began with Values and Process coding. The value codes were then sub coded into values, attitudes, and beliefs. Subcodes from there were specific to the data presented in the interview. The process codes are "ing" to show action.

Sample #3

Elizabeth's responses to the questions regarding the influence of the NSBECS were very high level. I hope to get more specific examples from field practitioners such as principals in the buildings. It is clear that Elizabeth believes that the NSBECS are very influential in the Diocese of St. Xavier. Many of her responses were regarding the scoring, consistency, and evidence that was provided. Those elements were all aligned to the domains and standards of the NSBECS.

Sample #4

Jane is new to Catholic school administration. It is clear that she is on board with using the NSBCS and can see the importance in using them in the diocese; however, she is overwhelmed with them. She touched on the importance of training and getting to know the NSBECS prior to using them for accreditation and school improvement. She also needed to adjust in certain areas to meet the needs of the specific students and families at Holy Cross.

Sample #5

After first-cycle coding, several themes are surfacing in the interview data. A few themes that have emerged are differentiation in the standards, the standards can be redundant at times, and addressing the uniqueness of Catholic schools (planning, schools boards, operational vitality). In addition, the uses of the NSBECS have a great deal of consistency in the Diocese of St. Xavier.

APPENDIX H: EMBEDDED SUBUNIT FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your professional role(s) and responsibilities.

2. Please describe your role and experience(s) with accreditation in your Catholic school.

3. Describe how you use the NSBECS for accreditation in your school.

4. In your opinion, how do the NSBECS influence overall school improvement through the accreditation process?

5. In your opinion, how, if at all, could the NSBECS be improved to further address school improvement in Catholic schools?

6. What else can you share, or do you suggest I ask in future focus groups?

APPENDIX I: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please introduce yourself.

2. Please describe your professional role and responsibilities.

3. Please describe your experience(s) with the NSBECS.

4. Describe your experiences with accreditation in Catholic Schools.

5. What are the current processes for accreditation in your diocese (diocesan leaders)?

6. What are the current processes for accreditation in your Catholic school (school administrators)?

7. How do you use the NSBECS for accreditation?

8. In your opinion, how has using the NSBECS in multiple accreditation years impacted school growth and improvement?

9. What type of data do you collect in the accreditation process?

10. How do you use the NSBECS to collect and/or track data in the accreditation process?

11. What influence have the NSBECS had on systemic school growth and continuous improvement in your diocese (diocesan leaders)?

12. What influence have the NSBECS had on school growth and continuous improvement in your Catholic school (school administrators)?

13. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving the culture of your Catholic school(s).

14. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving leadership in your Catholic school(s).

15. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving student performance in your Catholic school(s).

16. Describe the influence of the NSBECS on improving the operations of your Catholic school(s).

17. How, if at all, could the NSBECS be improved to better influence overall school growth and continuous improvement?

18. What else can you share, or do you suggest I ask in future interviews?

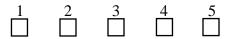# APPENDIX J: LIST OF SITE DOCUMENTS

Governing body video – Recording

Governing body video – Preparing for a visit

Governing body video – Serving on a team

St. Takeri Accreditation Report

St. Andrew Accreditation Report

Holy Cross Accreditation Report

Confidentiality Agreement

Accreditation Site Visit Timeline

Accreditation Site Visit Overview

St. Takeri School Improvement and Strategic Plans

APPENDIX K: INFLUENCE AND THEME SURVEY

NSBECS Influence

The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Schools have a great deal of influence on school improvement in Catholic schools.

Please use the following scale to answer the above statement: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐

Accreditation Influence

The process of going through accreditation has a great deal of influence on school improvement in Catholic schools.

Please use the following scale to answer the above statement: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Undecided, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

1 ☐   2 ☐   3 ☐   4 ☐   5 ☐

RQ Theme Importance

Please rank the following themes from the central research question in this study from most important to least important.

Central Research Question: How do Catholic school leaders in the Diocese of St. Xavier use the NSBECS to inform their school improvement processes through accreditation?

	Planning	Data Collection	Self-assessing
1st Choice	☐	☐	☐
2nd Choice	☐	☐	☐
3rd Choice	☐	☐	☐

Central Research Question Themes: Are there any themes that are not presented above that you are surprised did not emerge in the data collected in this study? If so, please identify below.

SQ1 Theme Importance

Please rank the following themes from sub question 1 in this study from most important to least important.

Sub Question 1: How do Catholic school leaders describe the influence of the NSBECS on overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

	Marketing/ Enrollment	Catholic identity/ Catholicity	School boards/ Committees
1st Choice	☐	☐	☐
2nd Choice	☐	☐	☐
3rd Choice	☐	☐	☐

Sub Question 1 Themes: Are there any themes that are not presented above that you are surprised did not emerge in the data collected in this study? If so, please identify below.

SQ2 Theme Importance

Please rank the following themes from sub question 2 in this study from most important to least important.

Sub Question 2: How, if at all, can the NSBECS be improved to further influence overall school growth and continuous improvement in Catholic K-12 schools?

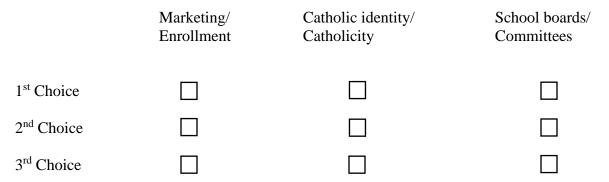|	Redundancy	Differentiation
1st Choice	☐	☐
2nd Choice	☐	☐

Sub Question 2 Themes: Are there any themes that are not presented above that you are surprised did not emerge in the data collected in this study? If so, please identify below.

APPENDIX L: LIST OF CODES

Codes

1st Cycle Value Codes	1st Cycle Process Codes	2nd Cycle Pattern Codes
NSBECS Improvement	Adjusting	Differentiation
Influence on Growth and Continuous Improvement	Prioritizing	Redundancy
	Planning	Planning
Uniqueness of Catholic Schools	Accrediting Process	Strategic Planning
Contrast of Standards	Needing Training	Planning for School Improvement
Dissatisfaction with Secular Standards	Collecting Data	Uniqueness of Catholic Schools
Serving on a Team	Using NSBECS	
Quality/Excellence	Using Data	School Boards/Committees
Enrollment	Growing	School Improvement
Consistency	2nd Iteration	Consistency
Evidence	Changing	Data Collection
Overwhelmed	Scoring	Self-assessing
NSBECS as Influential	Self-assessing	Scoring/Rating

APPENDIX M: RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEMES

Themes

Research Question	Major Themes	Subthemes
Central Research Question	Planning Data Collection Self-assessing	Strategic Planning School Improvement
Sub Question One	Influence	Marking and Enrollment Catholic Identity and Catholicity School Boards and Committees
Sub Question Two	Redundancy Differentiation	

APPENDIX N: DOCUMENT ANALYSIS KEY WORDS AND THEMES

Document	Keyword(s)	Theme
Accreditation Site Visit Timeline	Strategic plan	Planning
	Self-study	Planning
	Catechist certification	Influence
	Board	Influence
	Report	Data Collection
	Findings	Data Collection
Accreditation Site Visit Overview	Ratings, benchmarks	Planning
	Narrative, benchmarks	Planning
	Prepare	Planning
	Marketing	Influence
	Development	Influence
	Technology	Influence
	Evidence	Data Collection
	Legal compliance	Data Collection
St. Takeri Accreditation Report	Religious education	Influence
	Catechist certification	Influence
	Evidence	Data Collection
	Integration of faith	Influence
	Service programs	Influence
	Governing body	Influence
	Governing body support	Influence
	Not a parish school	Revision
	Professional development	Planning, Influence
	Plans for growth	Planning
	Opportunity	Planning, Influence
	Engage and motivate students	Influence
	Beginning of work	Planning
	Monitor and assess	Self-assessing
	Implementation	Planning
	Measured by student learning	Data Collection
	Evaluate student work	Data Collection
	Communication to community	Planning
	Cost to educate	Influence
	Asset planning	Planning
	Plan for the future	Planning
	Compiling data	Data Collection
	Catholic culture	Influence

	Mission-driven	Influence
	Governance model	Influence
	President/principal model	Influence
	Document professional collaboration	Data Collection
	Repeated comments	Revision
St. Andrew Accreditation Report	ACRE test	Influence
	Analyzing data	Data Collection
	Evidence	Data Collection
	Catholic culture	Influence
	Opportunities for student reflection	Planning
	Planning retreat experiences	Planning, Influence
	Repeated comments	Revision
	Parent faith formation	Influence
	Formation of children	Influence
	Establish opportunities	Planning
	Developing a succession plan	Planning, Influence
	Staff goals	Planning
	Tied to instruction and data	Data Collection
	Observation tools	Self-assessing
	Operational vitality	Influence
	Refine committees	Planning, Influence
	School board	Influence
	Data driving instruction	Planning, Data Collection
	Opportunities for integration	Planning
	Data-driven decision making	Planning, Data Collection
	Shared with school board	Influence
	Assessment of students	Data Collection, Self-assessing
	More programs needed	Revision
	Cost to educate	Influence
	Finance committee experts	Influence
	Financial plans	Planning, Influence
	Budgeted plan for capital improvements	Planning

	Marketing coordinator	Influence
	Multiple information technologies	Influence
	Marketing plans	Planning, Influence
	Development plan	Planning, Influence
	Funding prospects	Influence
	Board evaluation	Influence, Self-assessing
	Future-oriented strategic planning	Planning
	Forward thinking	Planning
	Plan for PLC meetings	Planning
	Faith formation program	Influence
Holy Cross Accreditation Report	Self-study	Self-assessing
	Proclamation of faith	Influence
	Evidence	Data Collection
	Electronic documentation	Data Collection
	Certified catechists	Influence
	Plan of pursuance of certification	Planning
	Religious standards in all subjects	Influence
	Lens of scripture	Influence
	Integration of Catholic social teaching	Influence
	Student leadership in prayer and liturgy	Influence
	Repeated comments	Revision
	Role models of faith	Influence
	Roster of board members	Influence
	By-laws	Influence
	Functioning subcommittees	Influence
	Policy revision in board minutes	Influence
	Staff evaluations	Self-assessing
	Plan for programming	Planning
	Operational vitality	Influence
	Forward planning	Planning
	Individualized goal setting	Self-assessing, Planning
	Lack of student artifacts	Planning

	Targeted professional development	Planning
	Data reporting	Data Collection
	Does not match benchmark	Data Collection
	Financial planning	Planning
	Long-term planning for tuition	Planning, Influence
	Projected budgets	Planning
	Cost to educate	Influence
	Lack of personnel	Revision
	Marketing plan	Planning
	Communications plan	Planning
	Development committee	Influence
	Strategic planning	Planning
	Canonical administrator	Influence
Governing Body Video – Recording	Evidence	Data Collection
	Collect historical data	Data Collection
	Track and monitor progress	Data Collection
	More efficient	Planning
	Updating and listening	Planning
	Evaluation	Self-assessing
	Self-study	Self-assessing
	Catholic standards	Self-assessing, Influence
	Pilot schools	Self-assessing
	Feedback	Self-assessing, Data Collection
	Compliance records	Data Collection
	Annual self-assessment	Self-assessing
	Legal compliance	Data Collection
	Capture data	Data Collection
	Rating summary	Self-assessing
	Summary of where you are going	Planning
	Language from rubrics and benchmarks	Influence
Governing Body Video – Preparing for a Visit	Site visit	Planning
	Importing	Data Collection
	Self-study	Self-assessing
	Legal compliance	Data Collection
	School improvement plan	Planning

	Ratings	Self-assessing
	Standards and benchmarks	Influence
	Narrative and evidence	Data Collection
	Upload	Data Collection
	Strategic plan	Planning
Governing Body Video – Serving on a Team	Site visit	Planning
	Reports	Data Collection
	Self-study	Self-assessing
	Compliance	Data Collection
	Making notes	Data Collection
	Teacher certification	Data Collection
	Ratings summary	Data Collection
	Evidence	Data Collection
	Narratives	Data Collection
	Standards and benchmarks	Influence
	Setting up visits	Planning
St. Takeri Strategic Plan	Enrollment	Influence
	Marketing	Influence
	Marketing plan	Planning
	Market research	Data Collection
	Religious mission	Influence
	Academic strengths	Planning
	Board discussion	Influence
	Survey faculty and staff	Data Collection
	Community of faith	Influence
	Vocations	Influence
	Theology	Influence
	Professional development	Planning
	Prayer	Influence
	Discernment groups	Influence
	Liturgical calendar	Influence, Planning
	Backwards design	Planning
	Standards	Planning
	Data collection	Data Collection
	Formative and summative assessments	Planning, Data Collection
	Internal and external data	Data Collection, Planning
	Professional growth	Self-assessing
	Finance committee	Influence
	Tuition assistance	Influence

	Development committee	Influence
	Needs assessment	Self-assessing
St. Andrew Strategic Plan	Local parishes	Influence
	Five year rolling financial plan	Planning
	Long-term goals	Planning
	Strengthen faith life	Influence
	Curriculum review plan	Planning
	Board activities	Influence
	Identification of student needs	Data Collection
	Marketing plan	Planning
	Baptismal program	Influence
	Collecting information	Data Collection
	Parish marketing program	Influence
	Executive board	Influence
	Prospective student marketing	Influence
	Marketing committee	Influence
	Database	Data Collection
	Board chair	Influence
	Evaluate functionality	Self-assessing
	Marketing budget	Influence
	Operational vitality	Influence
	Faith formation retreats	Influence
Holy Cross Strategic Plan	Assessed	Self-assessing
	Development committee	Influence
	Enrollment	Influence
	Board level	Influence
	Development	Influence
	Demographic trends	Data Collection
	Mission and purpose	Influence
	Spiritual readiness	Influence
	Operational solvency	Influence
	Academic strategies	Planning
	Latino Catholicity	Influence
	Integrate technology	Influence
	Professional enrichment	Planning
	Master plans	Planning
	School board	Influence
	Assessment	Data Collection
	Measurement tools	Data Collection

	Church tradition	Influence
	Canonical administrator	Influence
	Standardized test scores	Data Collection
	Catechetical growth	Influence, Data Collection
	Operational objectives	Planning
	Academic objectives	Planning
	Engineering study	Data Collection
	Board resources	Influence
	Educational environment plan	Planning
	Review and revise master plans	Self-assessing
	Create operating budget	Planning
	Review and refine budget process	Self-assessing
	Marketing and public relations tools	Influence
	Classroom evaluation	Self-assessing
	Student intervention tracking	Data Collection
	Professional development log	Planning, Data Collection