

“Progress is our Most Important Product”



Baby-boomers who grew up as television watchers occasionally experience nostalgia for the simple commercials and ad campaigns of days past. Vintage slogans can be more memorable than the products they promote. In the 1950's, General Electric proudly proclaimed: *“Progress is our Most Important Product.”* As we choose slogans to promote our Catholic schools, perhaps we might consider recycling this catchphrase from the past: *“In Catholic Schools, progress is our most important product.”* Accountability for the school's progress is a key element in maintaining the school's vitality. The partnership between the Catholic school and its various publics is enhanced by sharing information, and accounting for the resources provided as well as the results achieved. This kind of accountability engenders community support that promotes the vitality of the school.

Catholic schools report individual student achievement scores to parents, but many also provide class averages or school norms as a benchmark to compare the individual child's progress. These school averages offer a general sense of the collective progress of the school. However, it is never possible to assess the quality of a school through one set of statistical data. School achievement test data are certainly not a complete accounting for all of the significant qualities of the school. Parents need to take a comprehensive look at all aspects of the school, not merely test scores, to get a sense of the school's progress and vitality.

Vital Catholic schools are committed to continuous improvement. They partner with parents and other members of the community to support the school in fulfilling its mission. Catholic schools serve children by cultivating their intellects, building their academic skills, forming their characters, nurturing their spirituality, and fostering their relationships with God. By reporting on the successes of their efforts Catholic schools are accountable to their supporters.



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As vital Catholic schools engage in process of continuous improvement and commitment to quality education, they often disseminate information such as summaries of accreditation reports, strategic plans, or long-range and annual goals to identify documented strengths as well as areas for growth. Reading, understanding, and discussing such information enables the informed parent to appreciate the successes of the Catholic school, as well as to recognize the school's hopes and aspirations for growth and improvement.

Here are some additional considerations and suggestions for parents as they assess the progress of their child's Catholic school and promote its vitality:

- Avoid using only school achievement scores as the sole indicator of school quality—also consider Catholic identity, and strength of Christian community, attention provided to individual student, and various other aspects of the school program in addition to achievement test data.
- Review reports of your child's achievement scores and discuss his or her progress with the classroom teacher. Ask your school for class averages on achievement testing and other benchmarks to help you assess and understand your child's performance.
- Never use testing data to rank schools one against the other. Look for a variety of indicators of school successes in academic progress, in the quality of Catholic identity, and in the spirit and lived values of its community.
- Refer to school improvement plans, accreditation reports and other such quality assessments of the school to identify the school's strengths and areas for future growth and improvement.
- Be a positive supporter of your school. Find ways that you can help your faculty, administration, and school board to promote and improve your child's school.
- Become active in groups such as school advisory committees, school boards, Home and School Associations, and other organizations to which the school is accountable. These groups promote the school's academic excellence, strong Catholic identity, and fiscal security and stability. These three qualities are characteristic of strong and vital schools.

If progress really is the Catholic school's most important product, as the old slogan indicates, then school parents have an important role in helping the school to make good progress and to remain vital and stable.

Peter Tantillo
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