

Archdiocese of Denver Office of Catholic Schools

Philosophy of Assessment

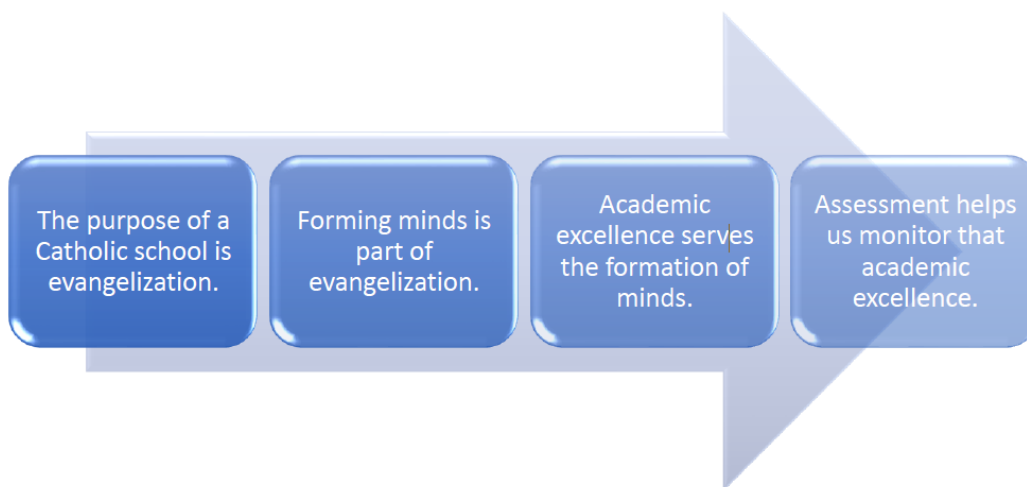
The Archdiocese of Denver Office of Catholic Schools, under the direction of Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila, believes schools serve an essential function in the evangelization and faith formation of Catholic children and families in Northern Colorado. As such and in accordance with *Gravissimum Educationis*, proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI (1965), we believe that our schools' purpose is to ensure that children flourish, embodying a fully human experience in which they are able and empowered to seek Truth. Pope Paul VI stated, "All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share."¹ Further, in 1998 His Holiness Pope John Paul II reminded us that, "The greatest challenge to Catholic education in the United States today, and the greatest contribution that authentically Catholic education can make to American culture, is to restore to that culture the conviction that human beings can grasp the truth of things, and in grasping that truth can know their duties to God, to themselves, and their neighbors. In meeting that challenge, the Catholic educator will hear an echo of Christ's words: 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:32).'"

Our schools have been bestowed a moral imperative to honor the God given intellect of each child, pushing them to achieve their full academic potential while instilling in them a faith base that is uniquely and fully Catholic. In fact, again in *Gravissimum Educationis*, Pope Paul VI tells us that, "Among all educational instruments the school has a special importance. It is designed not only to develop with special care the intellectual faculties but also to form the ability to judge rightly, to hand on the cultural legacy of previous generation, to foster a sense of values, to prepare for professional life."¹ In order to fulfill this importance, we must institute policies, practices and structures that align to and enable or beliefs to come to life in each of our schools. We believe in a Culture of Learning; we see assessment as a critical tool to fulfillment of our moral imperative to ensure that all children access their inalienable right to education. Though academic formation alone is not comprehensive enough to ensure flourishing and access to Truth, we recognize that it is among the critical functions served by Catholic educators. In this vein, we leverage assessment to support fulfillment of our moral imperative by objectively and consistently measuring students' academic progress in core content areas. We account for all children and leverage data cycles to support pushing each of them to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to fully flourish, engage, and reason from a Catholic worldview.

¹ Pope Paul VI. "Declaration on Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis." Vatican: The Holy See. Rome, 28 Oct. 1965. Web. 5 Nov. 2017.

² Pope Saint John Paul II. "Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Regions of Chicago, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee (USA) on Their 'Ad Limina' Visit." Vatican: The Holy See. Rome, 30 May 1998. Web. 5 Nov 2017.

Purpose of Assessment in Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools



Foundational Beliefs about Assessment and the Use of Data

- A Culture of Learning positions assessment as formative—the assessment data helps us ask questions and learn in order to form our next steps in instruction, and form our next steps as a community of professional learners in professional development.
- Our goal is not just collecting data, it is using data to address students' needs. Testing students must be coupled with data analysis in which the teacher, within a few days' time, looks critically at that data and determines next steps in instruction.
- Assessments, combined with a carefully designed curriculum, help us with a roadmap of what students are learning every day.
- Assessments help us understand whether individual students learned what we set out to teach. They help us see which students need help in particular areas, and which students are ready to move on to more challenging material.
- Assessments help us make decisions about future instruction. By looking at data, we can deliver much more targeted instruction to help individual students learn and master content they have not learned, as well as help us see whether what we set out to teach was actually mastered by the students.
- Students should be assessed regularly. By assessing regularly, teachers can identify problems in a student's learning and correct those problems in a timely manner.
- Assessment and engagement in data cycles helps to ensure that we fulfill the charge set forth by canon law (c. 806 §2) to ensure "that the instruction which is given in [Catholic schools] is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area."
- The data produced from student assessments should inform adult learning and coaching, classroom observations, and school-wide goals and foci.
- Assessments and the use of data cycles support adherence to high expectations for all children. By defining mastery and accounting for the learning and growth of all children we are better positioned to hold all students and adults in the system accountable for mastery of academic content.
- Principals, during observations, see just a slice of what is happening in the classroom. However, by doing thorough data analysis, and most especially by doing data analysis with the classroom teacher, a

principal can understand a lot more about what is happening in the classroom, and can pinpoint more precisely in which areas to help coach the teacher.

- Our students should feel a joy in learning, not a burden of assessment. Our language surrounding assessment should be helping students realize that assessments are not meant to categorize them, rather, assessments help us understand how to best help them learn. Students should not be pressured to score well on exams.

About the Assessments

STAR Assessments are online computer-adaptive tests (CATs). Instead of grade-level test forms, STAR assessments tailor items to a student's responses to quickly zero in on the student's achievement level and arrive at a reliable score. The first item is based on estimated ability level, using a student's grade level or previous test score. Correct responses cause the difficulty level of the next item to increase. If the student misses an item, the difficulty level is reduced. While each STAR assessment is individualized and unique, blueprints ensure that a certain number of items from the domains and skill sets are presented to each student.

Blessed Sacrament Catholic School administers the assessment three times a school year in the fall, mid-year and in the spring. The assessment data allows the teacher to adjust curriculum & instruction; enhances teaching practices; differentiates instruction; gives a clear picture on individual student needs; and provides a clear understanding of achievement growth for the student and parents.