



Advancing Catholic Education

Supporting Gifted Learners Through NSBECS and Continuous Mission-Driven Growth

By Janette Boazman, Ph.D.

The *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NSBECS) provide a comprehensive framework that ensures Catholic schools excel in faith formation, academic rigor and operational vitality. Supporting students with giftedness aligns directly with these standards, reinforcing the Catholic mission of education by fostering intellectual and spiritual growth, promoting differentiated instruction and ensuring all students receive an education that meets their unique learning needs. Catholic schools must recognize that serving students with giftedness is not about offering more to those who already have much, but rather about ensuring that each child has the opportunity to learn and grow every day.

For Catholic schools to continuously improve in their mission-driven work, they must actively assess and refine their approaches to serving all students, including those with giftedness. A common

myth is that students with giftedness will be okay because they are smart. However, the reality is that students with giftedness are at-risk students if their special education needs are not addressed in the school setting. These students are at risk for stunted academic growth, as well as personal, social and spiritual growth and development. Schools should regularly evaluate how they align with the NSBECS, ensuring that their instructional strategies, leadership models and financial sustainability efforts are effective and adaptable to evolving educational needs for students with giftedness.

Catholic Identity

The Formation of Gifted Learners

The first domain of the NSBECS focuses on Catholic identity, emphasizing that all students should be formed in faith, knowledge and service. This applies equally to students with giftedness, whose

intellectual abilities should be nurtured alongside their moral and spiritual development. Catholic schools have a unique opportunity to integrate faith into the education of gifted students by encouraging them to explore their gifts in a way that fosters gratitude, humility and a deepened commitment to service.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST), a guiding philosophy behind the NSBECS, affirms the inherent dignity of every person, emphasizing that all students deserve an education tailored to their potential. The principle of solidarity calls Catholic schools to ensure that gifted students use their talents for the common good, while subsidiarity reminds educators that decisions about curriculum and instruction should be made at the most effective level—allowing for flexible and responsive programming. Schools can nurture students with giftedness by incorporating service-learning projects, interdisciplinary faith-based inquiries and leadership roles that allow them to see their intelligence as a gift meant to serve others.

The call to educate gifted learners is not about providing them with “more” but about ensuring that every student in every classroom has the opportunity to learn and grow.

To support continuous improvement, schools can establish self-assessment tools and faculty reflection practices that ensure programs for students with giftedness remain mission-driven and aligned with Catholic identity. School leaders should foster discussions on how differentiation can deepen students’ faith formation, ensuring that intellectual rigor is never separated from the moral and ethical responsibilities of Catholic education.

Leadership and Governance

A Commitment to Continuous Growth and Inclusive Excellence

The second domain of the NSBECS underscores the importance of strong governance and leadership to ensure that all students’ learning needs are met. Catholic schools must implement clear policies that support the identification and development of students with giftedness, ensuring that differentiation and enrichment opportunities are not viewed as privileges but as essential components of an equitable education.

For PK-8 schools, this includes early identification protocols, differentiated lesson planning and flexible learning structures that allow gifted students to engage in deeper, more meaningful learning experiences. Schools should develop faculty training programs to equip teachers with the skills necessary to challenge advanced learners within a faith-centered context. High schools, meanwhile, should provide pathways that enable gifted students to explore their academic strengths through honors coursework, dual-credit opportunities and faith-based leadership development.

Catholic school leaders should embrace data-informed

decision-making to assess whether their programs are effectively meeting the needs of students with giftedness. Regular program evaluations, faculty surveys and student reflections should inform adjustments to curriculum and pedagogy, ensuring that instructional models remain dynamic and mission-focused.

Academic Excellence

Strengthening Instruction for Continuous Student Growth

The third domain of the NSBECS emphasizes academic excellence, calling Catholic schools to maintain high educational standards while fostering an environment where students are continuously challenged. Gifted students require learning experiences extending beyond rote memorization and standard instruction, allowing them to engage in higher-order thinking, problem-solving and creative expression.

In PK-8 settings, effective Catholic schools implement differentiated instruction to meet the needs of students with giftedness, incorporating Socratic seminars, inquiry-based projects and interdisciplinary research opportunities into their curricula. Middle school students, in particular, should have access to advanced electives, STEM enrichment programs and theology-infused humanities courses that cultivate their intellectual curiosity while strengthening their moral and ethical reasoning.

To ensure continuous improvement, schools should establish peer observation models and instructional coaching, where educators collaborate to refine their teaching methods for students with giftedness. Faculty members can work together to explore how faith and reason can intersect in high-level curriculum design, reinforcing the Catholic mission while advancing students’ academic experiences.

High school students should have access to advanced theology courses, Great Books discussions and service-based experiential learning models that connect academic achievement with Catholic identity. Schools must ensure that faith remains a guiding force in gifted education, encouraging students to see their talents as a means to glorify God and contribute meaningfully to society.

Operational Vitality

Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability of Gifted Education

The final domain of the NSBECS focuses on operational vitality, recognizing that Catholic schools must maintain financial sustainability while ensuring equitable access to academic programs. One

of the greatest challenges in Catholic education is making gifted programming financially viable while ensuring it remains accessible to students from all backgrounds.

PK-8 schools can implement low-cost differentiation strategies, such as multi-age learning groups, curriculum compacting and subject-based enrichment programs, allowing students to access advanced content without costly separate programming. High schools, meanwhile, can leverage external partnerships, diocesan grants, and tuition assistance programs to expand access to gifted education opportunities without creating barriers for families.

A critical component of sustainability is professional development. Schools must invest in teacher training initiatives that equip educators to differentiate instruction within the general classroom setting, reducing the need for separate gifted programs while ensuring that students with giftedness remain engaged. Additionally, faith-based mentorship initiatives can pair students with Catholic professionals and scholars, providing opportunities to explore their interests in a real-world context while reinforcing Catholic values.

Thriving in Mission-Driven Work

Catholic education is not solely about academic achievement; it is about forming saints and scholars who will use their God-given talents to serve others and glorify God. The NSBECS provide a clear roadmap for ensuring that gifted students receive an education that is both challenging and faith-centered, while CST calls schools to uphold the dignity of each learner and provide equitable opportunities for growth.

By integrating the principles of the NSBECS and CST into gifted education, Catholic schools affirm their commitment to:

- Recognizing and honoring each child's God-given potential
- Providing faith-integrated instruction that fosters moral and intellectual development
- Ensuring sustainable, equitable and mission-driven learning environments
- Empowering gifted students to become faith-filled leaders dedicated to serving the common good
- Using continuous assessment and faculty collaboration to refine and improve gifted education

The call to educate gifted learners is not about providing them with “more” but about ensuring that every student in every classroom has the opportunity to learn and grow. By fully embracing the alignment between NSBECS and CST, Catholic schools can create environments where all students, regardless of ability, are formed in wisdom, faith and service, continually improving their mission-driven work.



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