Why is collaboration required and what must it look like?

A college president’s perspective

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Some caveats.....

- 1. I confess that these reflections are inspired by my frustrations...
-   a. with the failure of our leaders to reach consensus over what is most needed from Catholic schools and Catholic institutions of higher education
-   b. the unsustainable nature of our present private schools—at all levels
-   c. the competing and never-ending set of requests for assistance
-   d. the cynicism and lack of will within some quarters of our Church regarding the worth of catholic schools.
Caveats, continued...

- 2. These remarks amount to one suggestion and not a full explication of the problem.

- 3. Joe O’Keefe, SJ already addressed this topic beautifully yesterday and you already began developing concrete suggestions for us.

- 4. I decided to make this a power-point presentation because I heard you only remember about 10% of what you hear, just like the kids.
The first question is not whether, or why, or how, or who should collaborate. Rather, the important question for me is what must we collaborate about, or on? And, this conference has proposed a myriad of answers to that question. (maybe too many?)
Premise 2:

- We know what good Catholic schools look like (our non-negotiables, as we called them).
Premise 3:

We also know that much in Catholic education may not be salvageable, durable, etc., and may have to go the way of all flesh. That may not be completely bad.
Premise 4:

- Authority and control of the schools will remain diffused, decentralized. The issue of deciding who and what is worth supporting will elude us without a system of certification.
Premise 5:

- Missions will differ, populations served will differ. The form, shape, size and sponsorship will continue to be diverse.

Note: That diversity of sponsorship, model and focus has been a strength and will not likely go away. The Spirit will continue to invent new models and new schools.
Premise 6:

- Money will follow quality—most of the time—even more than “necessity.” Money for tuition, for training, for research will be invested in perceived “quality.” Creative models of funding are being invented.
Premise 7:

- We lack a “Good Housekeeping Seal-of-Approval” to designate quality.
We lack a signification for what is, in fact, an “Essential Catholic School.”

Note: Why “essential”? An essential school teaches essential Catholic doctrine, is essential in its ability to deliver an excellent education, is felt to be essential for the population it serves, etc.
Proposal (or proposition):

The non-negotiables should be translated into a set of Standards to designate an Essential Catholic School (an ECS).

□ What might they look like?
□ An ECS is defined as an academically rigorous school that builds character, teaches authentic truths of the Catholic faith, and is sustained by a community of support. It is a school which can:

□ 1. demonstrate parental involvement in age-appropriate ways in the education of the child.

□ 2. demonstrate that it promotes individual and communal responsibility and service.

□ 3. demonstrate a curriculum built on Gospel-values and one which clearly explains the truths of the faith in age-appropriate ways.
Continued...

- 4. demonstrate support from a believing, practicing community which is represented on its oversight board.

- 5. demonstrate that it uses outcomes-based, data-driven curricula and pedagogies.

- 6. demonstrate that its academic leader (principal) and its faculty are well-prepared, certified, for their respective roles and are in continuous education and ongoing training.

- 7. demonstrate that its governance and finances are open and transparent, that it is financially sustainable, and that there is a program for access for those who cannot pay the full cost of attendance.

- 8. demonstrate support and recognition from the local hierarchy.
Premise 8:

- These standards would themselves be based on data, and would be data-driven and thus constitute the “agenda” for research investment, as well as, the content for training and certification.
Premise 9:

- This would require the support of:
  A. Superintendents, at a minimum, to develop the standards...
  B. Bishops, to sanction and enforce such a program, at a minimum...
  C. The Catholic universities, at a minimum, to identify and carry out the necessary research, build the training programs necessary for the promotion of the certification.
Premise 10:

☐ Standards would push responsibility into the local level. Schools could opt out or opt in.

My point? The brand suffers when the quality is not uniform and is unclear.
What would this get us that we don’t have now?

- 1. A Catholic school would be able to assess where it stands against a set of real standards.
- 2. The Universities would be better able to know how to contribute.
- 3. Financial resources centrally distributed or raised would have guidance.
- 4. The creation or designation of “model” schools would be possible.
- 5. Brand clarity!
“The great tragedy would be for a Catholic boy or girl to grow up without knowing the joy of a Catholic way of life.”

...thanks, Joe