

Developing Catholic School Leaders: A Summary of Recent Opportunities Offered by the Catholic Schools Office

As part of its commitment to academic excellence and faith formation, the Catholic Schools Office offers professional development opportunities to its current and prospective school leaders. The professional development consists of four strands: secondary leaders, elementary principals, administrative candidates, and new principals. All of the sessions are planned by a Professional Development Team, which consists of four highly respected and deeply experienced school leaders and members of the Catholic Schools Office. Each session addresses three aspects of leadership – academic, spiritual, and managerial. These sessions also emphasize academic rigor, Catholic faith formation and the importance of nurturing relationships. Every professional development session includes time for leaders to share best practices and build relationships. Several recent professional development sessions are summarized below.

Successful Approaches to Middle School Education, December 10

A simulated roller-coaster ride was the jumping-off point recently for elementary school leaders who gathered at the Pastoral Center for a session on “The Middle School Student: Riding the Wave and Successful Approaches to Middle School Education.” Bill Gartside, Academic Vice-Principal at Boston College High School, and Patti Pope, Guidance Counselor at Boston College High School, presented information on the developmental needs of middle school students and how to address those needs in both the classroom and the middle school. Patti described the middle school years as the time when several major developmental trajectories are intersecting and young adults are experiencing both the “highest highs” and the “lowest lows.” Patti stated that, to ensure balance in the lives of young adolescents, teachers, administrators, parents and students must have common understandings of young adolescent development. After this crash-course in adolescent psychology, Bill offered some best practice suggestions on how to help middle school students have a positive school experience.



Bill Gartside and Russ Wilson

In his presentation, Bill relied on his past experiences as the very successful principal at Monsignor Haddad Middle School in Needham. He offered ideas on essential middle school programs, what assets a middle school teacher should possess, and how to work with and educate

middle school parents. Elementary school principals will now have the opportunity to visit successful middle school programs around the Archdiocese.

Developing Outstanding Teachers, December 10

“I wonder how many children’s lives we would save if we educators shared what we knew with each other.” Roland Barth

“Professional learning communities” is a catch phrase for all those who care about academic excellence. A sense of professional networks leapt forward on December 10 thanks to Ed Hardiman, principal of St. John’s Prep, and Professional Development Chair for Secondary School Leaders. Ed brought Deb Reed of Research for Better Teaching, who guided 20 secondary school leaders through a challenging session on how to improve teaching in all schools in the Archdiocese. Deb is a national leader on teacher quality and the improvement of teaching. A first-rate presenter, she is known for inspiring educators through rigorous, interactive workshops.



Deb Reed

“What teachers know, believe and can do,” Deb argues while citing empirical research, “is the most significant variable in increasing student achievement.” Standards, curriculum, lesson plans, educational technology—all depend on a highly skilled teacher to be optimally used. “There is a real knowledge base about teaching that is practical, accessible and real,” emphasizes Deb.

She closed the workshop by advising school leaders to broaden responsibility for “instructional leadership” in their schools by: Establishing a strong instructional leadership team charged with improving teaching and learning in all classrooms; appointing coaches and teacher leaders who work with the principal and the instructional leadership team to advance a school culture focused on quality instruction; and maximizing their classroom time as principals by allotting 60-90 minutes per week in total for short, high quality visits and conversations.

The Path to Becoming a Principal, December 15

A group of aspiring Catholic school leaders met recently for the second time at the Pastoral Center for a session on “The Path to Becoming a Principal.” For the 2009-2010 academic year, the Administrative Candidate Program has 20 participants who are discerning their leadership qualities and preparing to move into administrative positions within Catholic schools in the



Archdiocese. On December 15, three sitting principals shared their experiences as administrators. Christopher Beza, in his first year as principal of Sacred Heart in Weymouth, stressed the importance of time management, having a support structure in place, and the joys of working in the Catholic faith. Maura Bradley, in her fifth year as principal of Mission Grammar in Roxbury, discussed her three R's as principal – relationships, reading, and revising. Maura stressed the importance of making your day about the people and not the task. Finally, Charlotte Kelly, in her tenth year as principal of St. John the Evangelist in Canton, shared her top-ten list of the best and most challenging things about being a

Charlotte Kelly
principal.

Charlotte's final thought was that the best part of being a principal is that there are more kids to love and call your own. In the New Year, administrative candidates will have opportunities to shadow a sitting principal to get a better feel of a principal's day-to-day life and work.