

Diocesanwide Assessments

When did the initiative to test the students of the Diocese originate?

The initiative of Diocesanwide testing originated as a response to the consultation process during the preparatory phase preceding Synod V.

How did the initiative to test the students of the Diocese originate? Who was consulted?

In preparation for Synod V, there was a consultation process with the people of the Diocese that included questions regarding catechesis. In this consultation, a few of the recommendations included a request to return to the basics, to immerse students in a more thorough study of Scripture, and to help young people internalize the truths of the Faith in order to apply better the Faith to their daily lives. In response to the consultation, one of the acts of the Synod legislation was to assess students at key grades in order to know the extent to which these recommendations are being integrated. This is a particular law for the Diocese and its execution is not optional.

What is the purpose of the testing?

One principle function of a diocesanwide assessment is to focus the attention of educators and parents on outcomes that describe the effectiveness of the religious education in Catholic schools and RE programs. Students are not being tested on their faith, but on their literacy, that is their knowledge of the Faith. We are able see if the students are grasping the essentials of the Faith that lead to a deeper relationship with Christ in order to follow Him more closely in living the Christian life. Each individual parish will clearly see the strengths and weakness of students' knowledge of the Faith, providing the needed information to suggest how catechetical efforts may be more effective.

Children are accustomed to being tested in school, both in public and Catholic schools.

Testing our students in their knowledge of the essentials of the Faith underscores the importance of the subject. The message is given to all concerned that our relationship with Christ is of the highest importance.

Who developed the assessments?

In the Spring of 2002, as a result of the Synod, Dr. Robert Lecheler set up a committee to look at companies that produce religion tests. The committee chose the Catechetical Assessment Program (CAP) because it develops assessments based on the specific Diocesan curriculum

Who will be tested?

Young people throughout the Diocese in fourth, eighth and eleventh grades will be tested. Tenth grade may be tested if a parish program does not yet have Youth Ministry.

What were the results of the pilot testing?

Of the 900 students (10 Catholic Schools and 14 Religious Education Programs) who were pilot tested in October 2003, our results indicated the following: the young people were strong in their knowledge of the Sacraments. However, the students were weak on their knowledge of the Church: that Jesus began one Church, the Catholic Church, by instituting the seven Sacraments and choosing twelve Apostles to form the foundation, with Peter at the head. The students, according to their answers, did not understand that this structure, set up by Christ, continues today through the pope and the bishops, who are the successors to the college of the Apostles.

Reactions from students, especially the 11th grade, were very good. They were challenged, they had to think, and it caused them to examine further some truths of the faith that they had not yet internalized.

After the pilot tests were given, what changes have been made to the tests?

Each teacher who had students pilot tested was given an evaluation form. This feedback provided valuable information to make changes on the tests.

Catechetical Assessment Program (CAP) provided an item analysis on each question. The information points out which questions and answers need to be reworded, changed or deleted.

In order to conserve time and to make it more user friendly, the survey of Attitudes and Practices for the fourth grade has been shortened so that students now have three choices instead of five.

What is the format of the tests?

The questions on each of the tests are multiple choice. They are thought provoking questions; the students need to use what they know to answer the questions. Catholic Attitudes and Practices are surveyed in a confidential manner.

Why is it feasible that testing be given on a diocesan level?

In education, if we value it, we test it. With diocesanwide results, the Offices of Catechesis and Evangelization, Catholic Schools and Youth Ministry will have data that will assist us in knowing how to serve best the needs of the Diocese.

Why is it necessary that all schools and RE programs test at the same time in October?

Diocesan results are based on testing done at the same time. Testing done at various times throughout the year does not produce an interpretable diocesan picture.

Testing will be given in October so that test results can be used in the 2004-2005 academic year.

Students in Catholic Schools will be tested during the week of October 11th in no more than two sessions.

Are the assessments for the Catholic Schools the same as the assessments for the Religious Education Programs?

Yes, the tests are the same. There will be separate levels of proficiency set by Catholic Schools and RE Programs in advance of the October testing. This study will identify, for each grade level, a proficiency standard based on the systematically collected judgments of school teachers and catechists.

Will there be comparisons of scores between different Catholic schools, between Religious Education Programs or both?

There will be no comparisons. Each school and RE program receives its own, extensive information. The diocesan staff receives summary results of all schools and all RE programs that give the diocesan picture needed for planning workshops and other support services.

How long will the testing take?

There are 45 questions on the fourth grade test, and one minute per question is adequate. There are 60 questions on the eighth grade test and 75 questions on the tenth/eleventh grade test. The survey on Attitudes and Practices will take about thirty minutes for fourth grade and about fifteen minutes for eighth and tenth/eleventh grades.

How and when will the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization and the Office of Catholic Schools present the information of the testing to parish families?

A letter from the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization, addressed to the parents, will be provided to each school and RE program that explains diocesanwide testing. It is recommended that the summaries of the tests also be given or mailed to the parents of each of the respective grades.

What is the cost of the tests and when will the payment be due?

Cost of the test is \$2.10 per student. Payment for testing will be due with the submission of the tests. Schools and programs will only be charged for those who actually take the test.