

Background Information on Diocesan-wide Assessments

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

The initiative of Diocesan-wide assessments originated as a response to the consultation process during the preparatory phase preceding Synod V.

How did the initiative to assess 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 better apply the Faith to their daily life. 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 assessments?

One principle function of a diocesan-wide assessment is to focus the attention of educators and parents on outcomes that describe the effectiveness of the religious education and formation in Catholic schools and Faith Formation Programs. Students are not being assessed on their faith, but on their literacy, that is knowledge of the Catholic Faith. We are able to 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 student's knowledge of the Faith, providing the needed information to suggest how teaching efforts may be more effective.

Children are used to being tested in school, both in public and Catholic schools. Assessing 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. Bob Lecheler set up a committee to look at companies that produce religion tests. The committee chose Catechetical Assessment Program (CAP) because they develop assessments based on the specific Diocesan curriculum

Who will be assessed?

Young people throughout the Diocese in fourth, eighth and eleventh grades will be assessed. Tenth grade may be assessed in a parish program, especially if grades are combined.

What is the format of the assessments?

The questions on each of the assessments are multiple choice. They are thought-provoking questions; in the older grades, the students need to use what they know to answer the questions.

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

In education, if we value something, we test it. It is good and proper that all children throughout the Diocese be given the same assessment, so that there are no discrepancies. Moreover, with diocesan-wide results, the Offices of Catechesis and Evangelization, Catholic Schools and Youth Ministry will have data that will assist us in knowing how to best serve the needs of the Diocese.

Why is it necessary that all Catholic schools and Faith Formation programs assess at approximately the same time?

Diocesan results are based on assessments being given at approximately the same time. Assessments given at various times throughout the year do not produce an interpretable diocesan picture. Assessments are given in the fall so that weaknesses in children's faith formation can be addressed in the same academic year. Moreover, the results will show if the students are retaining the most important teachings of the Faith as taught in prior grades.

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

Yes, the assessments are the same.

Will there be comparisons of scores between different Catholic schools, between Faith Formation Programs in the parishes or both?

There will not be comparisons. Each school and Faith Formation program receives its own, extensive information. The diocesan staff receives summary results of all schools and all parish programs that give the diocesan picture needed for planning workshops and other support services.

How long will the assessments take?

There are 45 questions on the fourth grade assessment and one minute per question is adequate. There are 60 questions on the eighth grade assessment and 75 questions on the tenth/eleventh grade assessment.

How and when will the Catholic school or Faith Formation Program present the information of the assessments to parish families?

The Catholic School administrator and Director / Coordinator of the Faith Formation Program will inform the parents when the process of assessing will take place. Further information, such as sample questions and summary paragraphs that provide the content of the questions can be found on the Diocesan website: www.dioceseoflacrosse.com / Click on Office and Ministries followed by Catechesis. Click on the link entitled Diocesan-wide Assessments in the left-hand column.

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

Cost of the assessment is \$1.50 per student. Payment for assessing is due with submission of answer sheets. Schools and programs will only be charged for those who actually take the assessment.

Have the assessments been revised?

In 2008, after receiving feedback from administrators of the Catholic schools, teachers, Directors of Parish Programs and catechists, the assessments were revised. Further, Catechetical Assessment Program (CAP) provided an item analysis on each question. The information pointed out which questions and answers need to be re-worded, changed or deleted based upon prior results.

Although the scores have improved, there are still some areas that need to be addressed with further teaching and clarification. 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 Apostles.

Overall, reactions from students, especially the 11th Grade have been very good. Students said that they were challenged, they had to think, and it caused them to further examine some truths of the Faith that they had not yet internalized.