



Kristin Melley, director of the NCCSA, talks about the importance of Catholic Identity and resources for optimizing the learning environment in Catholic schools.

What is the National Catholic Center for Student Aspirations?

The NCCSA is a unique resource developed and operated by Assumption College for Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Our goal is to impact everyone within a school community—the parents, the support staff, the teachers, coaches, administration, and the students—to create an optimal learning environment, rich in the 8 Conditions that Make a Difference®. Our assessment tools, professional development programs, retreats, and leadership conferences are designed specifically for Catholic schools and help all learners discover self-worth, active engagement, and purpose in their education.

What are the 8 Conditions®?

The 8 Conditions are Belonging, Heroes, Sense of Accomplishment, Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, Spirit of Adventure, Leadership & Responsibility, and Confidence to Take Action. These Conditions help nurture Self-Worth, Active Engagement, and a sense of Purpose, which in turn help students develop aspirations. These conditions are based on the research of Dr. Russell Quaglia who has to date surveyed over half a million students.

Sounds like common sense.

Sadly, the 8 Conditions® are not so common; so says the research. Aspirations work is about helping teachers do more intentionally what good teachers do intuitively on their best days. It is also about inviting teachers to return to their core beliefs and put them into practice. If I teach social justice, but act unjustly, what are my students really learning?

How do you help schools figure out what needs to be worked on?

The NCCSA's Catholic School Surveys measures the 8 Conditions® and the Catholic identity of the school from the viewpoint of both students and staff. The demographic section asks about students' religious affiliation and practice to help schools who enroll students with a variety of religious backgrounds. "Belonging" is our first Condition and while Catholic schools may have a built-in sense of community, we are learning that this cannot be taken for granted.

What have schools that have taken the survey learned?

Catholic schools do much better than their public counterparts with Belonging and Heroes. We should be very proud of that. However, they generally do less well with the Active Engagement Conditions—Fun & Excitement, Curiosity & Creativity, and Spirit of Adventure (which is about healthy risk-taking). These Conditions support the critical thinking skills and mental flexibility that are increasingly sought after by colleges and employers. Many of the schools we work with directly focus on those Conditions.

How can my school get involved?

Take the student survey, sign up for a Student Aspirations retreat, attend our summer conference on how Catholic schools can best help its students find their vocation, and bring the *Stand Up, Speak Out* Student Leadership Conference to your school or diocese.