

What Makes a Jesuit High School Jesuit?



**Distinguishing Criteria for Verifying the
Jesuit Nature of Contemporary High Schools**

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INTRODUCTION

In the two centuries since the first Jesuit high school was established in the United States, our lay colleagues and brother Jesuits have creatively and courageously faced momentous challenges. We acknowledge with gratitude the zeal, energy, and vision of those who have gone before us as well as the efforts of those who continue their work today.

In order to support the important and successful work already evident in Jesuit high schools throughout the United States Assistancy, we offer the following principles and practical applications. We believe these criteria, derived from authoritative documents of the Society of Jesus, will help schools strengthen the Jesuit traditions to which they are dedicated. Acknowledging our responsibility to provide leadership in the educational apostolate, we hope that the following principles and applications lead to careful examination of their sources in the *Constitutions*, in the most recent articulation of the Society's self-understanding at General Congregation 34, and in the collection of important documents in Jesuit education published by the Jesuit Secondary Education Association as *Foundations*. By reflecting on these seminal texts, those involved in Jesuit education can experience and better understand the spirit that prompted us to write this present document.

Grateful for the excellent assistance the Jesuit Secondary Education Association provides schools through its programs and resource materials, we recognize a distinction between the roles of the Society of Jesus and the JSEA in assisting Jesuit schools. As a service organization, the JSEA makes available advice, programs, and other resources that can maintain and deepen a school's Jesuit identity. By presenting the criteria found in this document, we seek to help schools confirm their living relationship with the Society of Jesus. By demonstrating the distinguishing criteria we present here, the Jesuit high schools of the United States Assistancy show how authentically they function as apostolates of the Society of Jesus.

We gratefully thank those associated with Jesuit high schools who so generously embrace and advance the mission of the Society of Jesus. By accepting the invitation of St. Ignatius Loyola to labor beneath the banner of the Cross for the good of others, Jesuit high schools effectively promote Jesus Christ's justice and love for all people. We pledge our readiness to work with our colleagues in marshalling the resources necessary to bring the message of the Gospel to future generations through Jesuit secondary education. May the Lord who has begun this good work continue to bless it abundantly.

*Jesuit Conference Board
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
May 17, 2000*

THE FIRST APOSTOLIC PRINCIPLES

Principles

Jesuit high schools constitute one of the most effective forms for the apostolic activity of the Society of Jesus. These schools must be based in the same first principles which serve as the foundation for the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus:

- All apostolates of the Society can be defined as a “service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.”¹ The service of faith is the aim of every Jesuit mission while faith “directed toward the justice of the Kingdom” is its integrating principle.²
- The service of faith calls for “participation in the total evangelizing mission of the Church, which aims at the realization of the Kingdom of God in the whole of human society.”³ It is also the Jesuit mission to bring “the countercultural gift of Christ to a world that prizes prestige, power, and self-sufficiency.”⁴

Application

- Every Jesuit school has a clear mission statement that is consistent with the Society of Jesus’ definition of its own mission as expressed in the Constitutions and in decrees of recent Congregations. The school’s mission reflects the concern of these Jesuit documents for faith, justice, and evangelization.
- The appropriate governing body approves and disseminates the mission statement throughout the broader school community. Orientation of school personnel and trustees includes thorough discussion of the mission statement.
- The trustees and the administrators ensure implementation of the mission statement through regular review and evaluation.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION OF JESUIT EDUCATION

Principles

The Society of Jesus' way of proceeding demands close collaboration with all "who hunger and thirst after justice" in order to make "a world where the brotherhood of all opens the way for the recognition and acceptance of Christ Jesus and God our Father."⁵ At the same time, the "Jesuit heritage of creative response to the call of the Spirit in concrete situations of life is an incentive to develop a culture of dialogue in our approach to believers of other religions."⁶ Therefore, Jesuit schools "conscientize their students on the value of interreligious collaboration and instill in them a basic understanding of and respect for the faith vision of the members of the diverse local religious communities, while deepening their own response to God."⁷ The ultimate objective of the mission of education should be to contribute vitally to "the total and integral liberation of the human person leading to participation in the life of God himself."⁸

Application

- Those who attend Jesuit schools have the opportunity to experience Jesus Christ in an atmosphere that respects religious difference and promotes interreligious dialogue.
- Jesuit high schools foster the development of students as adult members of their faith communities.
- School personnel fulfill their responsibilities in ways that reflect agreement with the essential purposes of the institution and cooperation with their fellow workers.
- A Jesuit high school community reflects that ecumenical respect for all men and women of good will which was expressed by the Second Vatican Council.

3 SERVING THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Principles

A Jesuit high school publicly declares its Catholic character "and seeks to incorporate itself more and more vigorously and creatively into the life of the Church."⁹ Like the Society of Jesus itself, the Jesuit school acts "in the service of the worldwide mission of the Church."¹⁰ Above all, board members, teachers, and administrators in their work for students constantly seek to teach them to "learn in the Church, with the Church, and for the Church how to live our faith."¹¹

Application

- Every Jesuit school publicly declares its Catholic identity.
- Board members, administrators, and teachers live in conformity with the Gospel.
- Teachers take great care to present clearly and honestly the fundamental beliefs of the Church.
- The school strives to maintain a cooperative relationship with the bishop of the diocese and with his education office.
- Students are encouraged to participate actively in the life of their local faith communities.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND FORMATION

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Principles

The Society of Jesus urges us to take particular care that students “acquire that knowledge and character which are worthy of Christians, and that animated by a mature faith and personally devoted to Jesus Christ, [they] learn to find and serve Him in others.”¹² The 32nd General Congregation summed up the contemporary mission of the Society in these words: it is “to preach Jesus Christ and to make Him known in such a way that all men and women are able to recognize Him whose delight, from the beginning, has been to be with human beings and to take an active part in their history.”¹³ Furthermore, the Complementary Norms to the Constitutions remind Jesuits that their community should be “a faith community that comes together in the Eucharist with others who believe in Christ to celebrate their common faith.”¹⁴

Application

- The governing board and administrators of a Jesuit high school ensure that the religious programs and curriculum are formative, stimulating, and thought provoking.
- Those responsible for the religious formation of students in a Jesuit high school are enthusiastic and well trained in their discipline.
- The school’s liturgical life clearly demonstrates its Catholic character through well prepared liturgies that reflect the school community’s shared participation in Christ’s mission in today’s world.
- The governing board, administration, and faculty schedule time and provide financial resources for programs that encourage the spiritual formation of students, such as retreat experiences in various formats.
- A Jesuit school encourages organizations that provide ongoing support and fellowship for students and staff members in the daily living of the Gospel message. In particular, Jesuit schools establish faith-based groups such as Christian Life Communities.

TEACHING AND ACTING JUSTLY

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Principles

The school's policies should always reflect a clear sense of justice. The precepts of Catholic social teaching should be applied not only in dealings with the school's employees but also in making plans which will affect the "local socioeconomic needs" of the surrounding community.¹⁵ "Our schools have become platforms, reaching out into the community, not only to the extended school community . . . but also to the poor and the socially disadvantaged in the neighborhood."¹⁶ "We must in a special way help prepare all our students effectively to devote themselves to building a more just world and to understand how to labor with and for others."¹⁷

Application

- A Jesuit school maintains a clear sense of justice and respect for the legitimate rights of others in all its dealings with students, employees, parents, and the local neighborhood. The entire institution not only teaches justice but also acts justly.
- A Jesuit school manifests its solidarity with the poor by offering generous amounts of financial aid based on need and by its efforts to recruit and retain students from families of limited means.
- A Jesuit school has effective Christian Service programs which enable students to serve people in need thoughtfully and reflectively.

THE GLOBAL DIMENSION OF THE EDUCATIONAL MISSION

Principles

A Jesuit education should make students intellectually able to critically assess the values propagated by contemporary culture, and competent to evaluate the results of modern economic and social trends.

Above all, the education and formation offered students in Jesuit schools includes attention to areas such as “the protection of the human rights of persons and peoples, . . . the consequences of interdependence . . . , safeguarding human life itself . . . , the influence of the media in the service of justice . . . , protection of the environment . . . , the marginalization of not a few nations . . . , and the problem of the socially marginalized in every society.”¹⁸ A Jesuit education should aim to free its students to honestly confront the social injustices of racism, sexism, and religious intolerance.¹⁹ Schools should work to instill in their students a willingness to collaborate “with others, . . . with other members of local churches, with Christians of other denominations, with adherents to other religions, . . . with all who strive to make a world fit for men and women to live in.”²⁰

Application

- A Jesuit school prepares its graduates to analyze their own contemporary culture with insight and intelligence, thereby achieving the freedom to work for justice.
- In response to the current social teachings of the Catholic Church, a Jesuit education makes students sensitive to areas of injustice in modern society and encourages solidarity with the disadvantaged and dispossessed of modern global society. They recognize the suffering and pain which poverty, racism, sexism, and religious intolerance have caused not only in the world at large but even in their own communities.
- A Jesuit school seeks to hire teachers who are sensitive to the plight of suffering people.

7 EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Principles

Recent Congregations have stressed that Jesuit schools “should be outstanding not so much for number and size as for teaching, for the quality of instruction, and the service rendered to the people of God.”²¹ The last Congregation reminded educators in Jesuit schools that they were training men and women to assume “leadership roles in their own communities” as well as in “many Jesuit works in years to come.”²² The most recent Congregations have also called attention to the great progress in technology, communication and information exchange, and the need for a reasoned critical knowledge of the cultural revolution they have brought about. Stress is placed on education in communication in order to foster “critical knowledge of the rhetoric of this new culture, . . . an appreciation of its aesthetic dimension, . . . [and] the skills required for teamwork and for the effective use of media and information technology.”²³

Application

- A Jesuit school offers an academically distinguished program that is designed to challenge students to achieve their full potential.
- The school’s curriculum and methodology reflect fundamental agreement with the objectives and pedagogical methods advocated in the recent educational documents of the Society of Jesus.
- The students at a Jesuit school learn critical skills and acquire background to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the various movements with which they will have to deal. Students understand the Christian response to their own adolescent culture.
- School leaders ensure that teachers increase their knowledge of their fields and update their professional skills.
- Educators in a Jesuit school devote themselves to forming graduates who will be leaders in the communities in which they live, work, and worship.

COOPERATION IN MISSION



Principles

Modern Jesuit education must be characterized by that growing cooperation within the whole school community which “has expanded our mission and transformed the way in which we carry it out in partnership with others.”²⁴ The 34th General Congregation reminded Jesuits that today they carry out their mission as “Men with others.” “Men and women with others” are not only willing to share their spiritual and apostolic inheritance with their students but also to listen and learn from one another and from others in the outside community.²⁵

Application

- A Jesuit high school is conducted as a cooperative venture of the governing bodies, the administration, the faculty, and the staff. The particular strengths and expertise each individual contributes to the common effort is clearly understood and recognized by all.
- The leaders of a Jesuit school promote the clear understanding that the institution’s educational and formational objectives can only be achieved by shared agreement in its mission.
- Board members and school personnel receive an extensive orientation and ongoing formation in the traditions and mission of their school, Jesuit education, and Ignatian spirituality.
- Each Jesuit high school within the United States Assistency actively participates as a member of the Jesuit Secondary Education Association.

9 SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND OUTREACH

Principles

Maintaining and developing the Jesuit identity of a school depends on careful selection of board members, teachers, staff, and administrators and on “adequate formation in the Ignatian charism and pedagogy.”²⁶ Consequently, all Jesuits in the educational apostolate must serve their lay colleagues and professional partners “by offering them what we are and have received; namely, formation in our apostolic spirituality, especially . . . the experience of the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual direction and discernment.”²⁷ Jesuit secondary schools “should improve continually both as educational institutions and as centers of culture and faith for lay collaborators, for families of students and former students, and through them for the whole community of a region.”²⁸

Application

- Careful hiring practices and effective programs for professional and spiritual staff formation perpetuate a school’s Jesuit identity.
- A Jesuit high school has a developed plan for the continuing education and formation in Ignatian spirituality of board members, administrators, faculty, and staff.
- School leaders take appropriate measures to ensure that future leaders are trained in Jesuit Secondary Education Association workshops and seminars.
- Jesuits participate in programs of spiritual development offered by the school to the governing board, faculty, students, and the broader school community.
- A Jesuit school strives to be an important educational and religious center for its students, alumni, families, and neighboring community.

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THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES AND JESUIT PEDAGOGY

Principles

The Constitutions remind us that the works of the Society of Jesus are characterized by “a profound spiritual experience through the Spiritual Exercises.”²⁹ The 32nd General Congregation believed that “the spirit of the Exercises should pervade every other ministry of the Word that we undertake.”³⁰ In secondary education, this mandate has been especially strengthened by the evident intellectual and methodological connection between the Exercises and the educational objectives and methods described in Characteristics of Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach.

Application

- Board members, administrators, and faculty members have the means and the opportunity to experience the Spiritual Exercises.
- Those engaged in the ministry of secondary education have access to annual retreats, spiritual direction, and religious support.
- All those who work in the educational and formational areas of a Jesuit school grow in familiarity with the concepts and aims expressed and described in the *Characteristics of Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*.

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