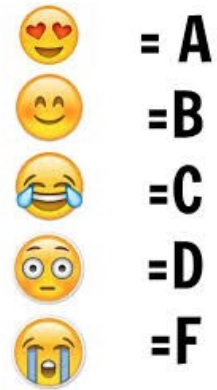


In most schools, for effort, conduct, and special subjects (ex. art, music, foreign language, physical education, technology), four number grades are given such as 4, 3, 2, 1 with 4 being the highest grade. Consider making 3 the average grade where students start with a 3. A student who comes to class, participates, hands in their work on time, and cooperates should receive a 3. A student who hands in exemplary work far above the expectation, excels in the content, participates, and cooperates more than most would receive a 4. On the other hand, the student who submits late, incomplete work and does not participate and/or cooperate earns a 2 or possibly a 1.



Teachers may argue that using rubrics inflates grades. If a child completes the rubric, they deserve the highest grade. Teachers should re-examine the rubrics to ensure that they are challenging students and separating the best students from the good students.

Once the faculty can agree on the 4, 3, 2, 1 grades, they may have the harder conversation about the numerical 60 – 99 or A, B, C, D, F grades. Keep in mind that it is a sense of justice to the students to receive appropriate grades. If students believe they are a top student when they are average, they may be set up for later failures and experience disappointment in their academic careers. Further evidence shows that lenient grading reduces student effort.



Have a conversation at your faculty meetings over what does an A look like - a B, a C, a D, and a F. It may be good to keep these points in mind.

- In the beginning of the year, be very cautious of your grading and err on grading low. The student will be challenged to do better. Psychologically it is better to improve in your grades rather than go down in your grades.
- 80 has always and continues to be the grade considered to be mastery.
- Educate your parents and students that 80 is a good grade. As a faculty talk about how this understanding of grades will be presented to them.
- Take a look at your honor roll. If more than 50% of your students are receiving honors, is your system challenging students? By the way, in many schools more than 80 % of the class achieve honors.
- If everyone in your class is getting 95 and above on all your tests, are your tests too easy?
- Are you able to agree with your grade partners on grading?
- Examine your report card grades. Does your best student stand out among the others? How close are your grades?

Grade inflation has evolved over time and it will take time and effort on the part of educators, schools, diocesan offices, and school districts to correct. Reflecting on your individual part with the dilemma will allow for some progress to be made.

ⁱ <http://www.gradeinflation.com/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/economic-intelligence/2013/12/26/why-college-grade-inflation-is-a-real-problem-and-how-to-fix-it>

ⁱⁱⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grade_inflation

Defining Characteristics of Catholic Education

An individual recently stated that she walked into two Catholic Schools and had a totally different impression from each one. One school portrayed all the characteristics of a Catholic School whereas in the other Catholic School she experienced none of the characteristics of a Catholic School. Upon further questioning over the experience, it appears that religious symbols were present in both schools; however, respect, discipline, and high expectations were quite evident in only one of the schools.



A simple Google search *Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools* produces several scholarly articles worth reading that are listed in the sources. One such source states the following. Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools flow directly from the Holy See's teaching on Catholic schools as compiled by Archbishop J. Michael Miller, CSB (The Holy See's Teaching on Catholic Schools, 2006), and from statements by Pope Benedict XVI and the American bishops. The characteristics define the deep Catholic identity of Catholic schools and serve as the platform on which the standards and benchmarks rest. The defining characteristics authenticate the standards and benchmarks, justifying their existence and providing their meaning. The Defining Characteristics include:



- Sustained by Gospel Witness
- Shaped by Communion and Community
- Accessible to All Students
- Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop
- Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ
- Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church
- Distinguished by Excellence
- Committed to Educate the Whole Child
- Steeped in a Catholic Worldview¹

While this provides much thought for reflection, practically speaking, what are the defining characteristics of a Catholic School? What did the person see in the first Catholic School that was not present in the other Catholic School? Take a look at the practical list below. Evaluate your own school. What do visitors see, and would they say that your school has the Defining Characteristics of a Catholic School?

Catholic Identity

- The administration, faculty, staff, students, and volunteers give witness to Jesus Christ by their behavior and conversations.
- Prayer encompasses the program. Days begin and end with prayer. Catholic traditional prayers and spontaneous prayers are prayed throughout the day. The members of the community are frequently remembered in prayer.
- A crucifix and Blessed Mother statue in good condition are present in each room.
- Religious items and pictures are placed throughout the school.
- Faculty and student body are aware of the liturgical season, for example, during the Advent and Christmas season, Advent wreaths, Christmas Trees, Nativity sets adorn the hallway.
- A sense of community is evident to all those involved with the school.
- The faculty and student body attend Mass, go to confession, and have religious prayer services throughout the year.
- Religion is taught not only as a subject but throughout the day.



Respect

- Students hold the door for adults and one another.
- Students stand and greet an adult when they enter the room.
- In the hallways, students greet faculty, visitors, and one another.
- If a student sees an adult carrying something, on their own they offer to the person.
- Students have a healthy respect and understanding of authority.
- Boys do not wear hats inside the building.
- Courtesy is taught and expected at all times such as saying, *please and thank you*.



help

Discipline

- An atmosphere of calm and quiet permeate the hallways allowing for all students in classrooms to learn.
- Students know the expected behavior and respond.
- Students raise their hands in classrooms.
- Teachers do not accept inappropriate behavior that includes public put downs of other students in the classrooms.
- A uniform policy is enforced that includes: appropriate length of girls' skirts, clean uniforms without tears or holes, fastened top button of boy's shirts, appropriate safe shoes with shoe laces tied.
- Students enter and leave the building each day in a respectful manner.



High Expectations

- Grade 3 and above write in legible cursive at all times.ⁱⁱ
- Grades 4 and above write in blue or black pen for everything except math. Pencils are always used in math class.
- Assignments submitted on time that are neat, complete, and show good content. If the submitted assignment does not meet the child's ability, it is returned to the student to be redone.
- Students come to class prepared with books, charged tablets, and supplies ready to learn.
- Rigorous and relevant curriculum leading to career ready and college prepared students.



Faculty and Staff

- Faculty and staff live the Gospel Message of Jesus Christ in the way that they interact with one another, students, and parents.
- Faculty and staff pray together on a regular basis and participate in an annual full day retreat.
- Faculty and staff nurture and care for the students challenging them to be the best they can be at all times.
- Faculty and staff know and understand the Mission of Catholic Schools and in particular their individual Catholic School.



ⁱ <https://www.catholicstandards.org/the-standards/defining-characteristics>

ⁱⁱ Read, *A Case for Cursive Handwriting*, from the 11-16 edition of the Best Practices ABC Notes. For a copy email: smtadams@gmail.com for a copy.

Sources:

<http://ucsdcs.org/documents/catholic-identity/46-defining-characteristics-of-catholic-schools-final/file>

<http://www.phdcomics.com>

For additional information regarding the IHM Best Practices contact Sister Margaret Rose Adams, IHM at smtadams@gmail.com