

# IMPROVING COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

“Standards are meaningless until you define how to assess them. Therefore, assessments are the starting point.”

Dr. Jorge Peña, Former Director of School Improvement and Catholic School Accreditation,  
Archdiocese of Chicago

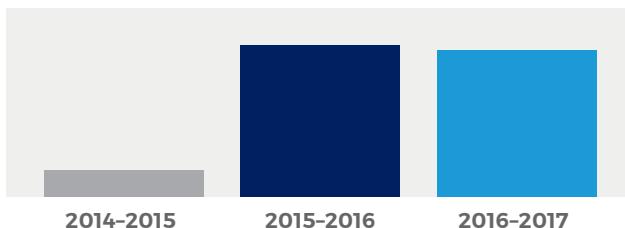
ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO



The Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools system serves more than 78,000 students in 217 schools in Cook and Lake counties of Illinois. As the largest private school system in the United States, the school system wanted to dramatically impact college and career readiness among its students. ACT Aspire provided the longitudinal data to help them do just that.

## Expanded Testing, Increased Readiness

The Archdiocese of Chicago school system continues to expand ACT® Aspire® testing.



### STUDENTS TESTED

2014-2015 5,361 tested

2015-2016 30,772 tested

2016-2017 30,004 tested

ACT SOLUTIONS USED



ACT Aspire provided the Archdiocese of Chicago with an assessment tool that informed instruction and improved college and career readiness.

When the Archdiocese of Chicago updated its curriculum to align with a new set of educational standards, it needed a new assessment in line with the new curriculum that provided greater tools for analysis. Dr. Jorge Peña, Former Director of School Improvement and Catholic School Accreditation at the Archdiocese of Chicago, considered many tools, but only one was a good fit for the private Catholic school system – ACT Aspire.

Peña and his team tested the water by first administering Aspire to eighth graders. The feedback and results showed that, while students excelled, there was room for improvement. Following this pilot, they administered Aspire summative assessments in grades 3–8 in all schools and grades 9 and 10 at high school. Some schools in the system are using periodic testing. The Archdiocese of Chicago also participates in the ACT District Testing program for grades 11 and 12.

The school system has been testing since 2015. The two years of data collection provides information on instructional efficacy. Using the assessment results, Peña and his team designed a comprehensive improvement process that allows teachers to coordinate strategies based on student need.

**“We use the Aspire data to teach skills that the assessments show are challenging for students. If I improve my practice as a teacher, that helps next year’s students as well. It helps us reflect on our practice as educators. Those are conversations we didn’t have before [ACT Aspire].”**

Dr. Jorge Peña, Former Director of School Improvement and Catholic School Accreditation, Archdiocese of Chicago

Aspire has helped create a culture valuing objective results and collaborative planning. Vertical grade-level teams also help educators use the assessment data and collaborate on instructional strategies by subject.

One school noted that math was the lowest-performing strand. In analyzing the data, Peña and his team identified math communication as an area of improvement. To address this, they had students keep math journals. Over time, they observed that student math was improving. When they administered Aspire in April 2016 and reviewed the results, they saw that math communication was the highest-performing skill.

**“When I saw the results, I almost cried. I got so happy! The students benefited, and it shows on the assessment.”**

Dr. Jorge Peña, Former Director of School Improvement and Catholic School Accreditation, Archdiocese of Chicago

The Archdiocese of Chicago is able to look at the improvement of individual cohorts by incorporating Aspire’s growth percentile. While some groups may not be ready currently, group growth indicates that they will be ready if the current rate of growth is maintained. Future data will only make this stronger. Aspire also provides comparative data with public schools, which is critical in promoting the private school system.

To find out more about the benefits of Aspire and how to offer it to your students, go to [act.org/aspire](http://act.org/aspire).