ABSTRACT
The 2009 Catholic School Mental Health and Wellness Survey provided some of the first nationally representative estimates of mental health services and staffing in private schools (Frabutt, Clark, & Speach, 2010, 2011). The current project utilizes the qualitative portion of that data set to examine how Catholic school principals describe both their greatest needs and most successful practices in regard to serving children’s mental health needs.

PROBLEM CONTEXT and RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The U.S. Catholic education sector operates over 7,000 schools and educates 2.1 million students (McDonald & Schultz, 2010). However, there is a paucity of available data concerning whether and to what extent students in Catholic schools receive mental health services and supports. Moreover, little is known about the views of school principals toward social/emotional development and mental health. As Adelman and Taylor (2011) recently noted, “Failure to address the principal’s role related to student and learning supports reflects the widespread tendency to marginalize this essential component of school improvement” (p. 8). Thus, the primary research questions in this inquiry centered on defining:

1. What are schools’ greatest needs in regard to supporting students’ socioemotional wellness and mental health?
2. What are faculty and staff’s greatest training and professional development needs in regard to supporting students’ socioemotional wellness and mental health?
3. What do principals perceive as the most successful approach or strategy that their school has used to improve the mental health of students?

METHOD
Participants. Participants were a convenience sample of principals of 346 Catholic elementary schools (Frabutt, Clark, & Speach, 2010, 2011). The current project utilizes the qualitative portion of that data set to examine how Catholic school principals describe both their greatest needs and most successful practices in regard to serving children’s mental health needs.

FINDINGS
The line-by-line qualitative coding of principals’ responses contributed to an overarching understanding of the primary research questions. Main thematic trends were derived for the three research questions, each corresponding to one of the open-ended survey items. Thus, boxes below present the emergent themes, elucidated via overarching descriptions, representative quotations, and frequency of relevant coded references.

GREATEST NEEDS
Of 342 separately coded text segments dealing with principals’ responses to this survey prompt, the three most prominent categories were Personnel (45%); Finances (23%); Specific Issue Area (17%).

PERSONNEL
• Principals articulated specific needs: “we need access to more counseling,” “social skills training for students,” and “individual and group counseling.” Also, principals noted a need for better staffing and qualifications of other professionals in the school. “We need personnel to operate counseling center,” “qualified staff,”

FINANCES
• “Money,” “cost,” “$$$$$$,” and “financial needs” are at the root of securing and retaining staff to address children’s mental health needs. One strand of comments, often clipped and brief in nature, generally mentioned financial constraints as a predominant need area. Representative comments in this vein were: “costs involved,” “lack of finances,” and “the funds!”

SPECIFIC ISSUE
• Principals articulated specific needs: “we need access to more counseling,” “social skills training for students,” and “individual and group counseling.” Also, principals noted a need for better and more immediate identification of student mental health and wellness needs.

SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES
Principals’ responses in this domain yielded 306 text segments. The most frequently occurring themes were Specific Program or Curriculum (33%); Personnel (23%); Relationship with Home (14%).

PERSONNEL
• Principals described many specific school-based programs, curricula, or interventions. Some briefly indicated one item as their best practice: “establishment of our intervention Assistance Team,” or “peer intervention.” Others listed strategies such as “our curriculum, observant teachers, differentiated instruction, tutoring, prayer circles, journaling.”

SPECIFIC PROGRAM
• Principals articulated specific needs for student mental health and wellness. They referred to the invaluable contributions of school social workers, counselors, psychologists, resource teachers, school nurses, and intervention specialists. “What asset to our school,” one commented.

RELATIONSHIP WITH HOME
• A high-quality home-school relationship was often cited: “One thing is that our parents are actively involved and that in turns helps our students.” Another explained. “We have very involved parent population. They are usually very receptive to receiving suggestions for help for their children.” Principals described deep and significant parent involvement that was fostered by “open,” “strong,” or “close” communication.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
There were 271 coded text segments regarding professional development needs. The most frequently mentioned thematic areas were Specific Training (34%); General Training (22%); Awareness/Identification of Mental Health Issues (12%).

• Principals mentioned a specific type of training or professional development need that was most apparent at their school or among their faculty. Citing the need for increased knowledge, direct training experiences, or exposure to new trends, principals’ comments spanned a wide range of areas.

• 59 comments referred to “training in general,” without reference to a specific program or topic. One stressed the importance of “providing inservice that will help the faculty and staff.” Multiple comments referred to “access to training,” “classes for faculty and staff,” “obtaining information,” and “educational resources.”

• Principals highlighted the importance of faculty awareness as a necessary pre-condition for a school’s responsiveness to student mental health. Multiple one-word responses to this item mentioned either “awareness” or “knowledge.” “Faculty need to have training in order to identify students who may need further services,” one wrote.

REFERENCES