



FAITH IN OUR FUTURE

Catholic Schools and the Common Core: A Primer

1. What is the Common Core?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of national education standards adopted by 45 states, the District of Columbia, and over 100 Catholic dioceses. They are intended to help students acquire specific skills at each grade level rather than to rely on 50 different sets of state standards (*National Catholic Register*, 2013).

The development of the CCSS began in 2007, coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State Officers (CCSSO), and written by K-12 teachers, post-secondary faculty, state curriculum and assessment experts, discipline area researchers and national organizations. (Archdiocese of Chicago, Office of Catholic Schools, 2013).

2. What is the rationale behind the CCSS?

The driving force behind the creation of the CCSS was the need for college and career readiness. College and career personnel found that high school graduates who would either enter the workforce or continue their learning at post-secondary sites were inadequately equipped in knowledge and skills (Ozar, 2013). Research repeatedly cites that inadequate preparation is a central factor in the disappointing college success rates (*The College Completion Agenda: 2010 Progress Report*, Lee & Rawls, 2010).

The continual development of remedial courses at the college level was also noted due to a lack of preparation upon entrance (Ozar, 2013). Almost half of the 3 million people in the U.S. who start their first year of college will drop out before they earn their first degree, and 30% will drop out after their first year. At the community college level, out of 6 million students, 1 million will take remedial courses. Students who take remedial courses are highly likely to drop out (*The College Completion Agenda: 2010 Progress Report*, Lee & Rawls, 2010).

Furthermore, the CCSS were created because there appeared to be a lack of equity in knowledge and skills from coast to coast. Student achievement was higher in some

geographical areas of the nation. The call for a more uniform standards' platform in which grade level expectations and outcomes were the same across the country, no matter where the student was enrolled for elementary and secondary education, was developed in order to address the question of equity in student learning (Ozar, 2013).

3. What are the shifts with the Common Core?

The fundamental shifts with the CC are wrapped around the concepts of academic rigor; rigor in which student learning spirals or is allowed to be taken to the next level of learning based upon the previous level. Research, evidence, facts, argument, rubrics, performance, communication and collaboration are the central tenets associated with academic rigor and are therefore foundational to the CCSS (Ozar, 2013).

The CCSS shifts in Mathematics consist of:

- a) focusing strongly where the standards focus;
- b) coherence - thinking across grades and linking to major topics within grades;
- c) rigor - pursuing conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and application using higher-order thinking; and
- d) principles that include numbers, equations, functions, quantity, modeling, shape, probability, and statistics (McDonald, 2012; Mears, 2013).

The CCSS shifts in English-Language Arts and Literacy consist of:

- a) building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction;
- b) reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational;
- c) regular practice with complex text and its academic language; and
- d) vocabulary acquisition, as research shows that students must know 93-97% of words for reading comprehension (Mears, 2013).

A major shift in the CCSS is writing: writing across the curriculum in all core academic areas (Mears, 2013). Integrating writing with reading enhances comprehension because the two are reciprocal processes (Brandenburg, 2002). Using reading and writing to teach a subject area is foundational to the CCSS because understanding subject matter involves more than “doing” and “knowing” something. Mastery of content is demonstrated not only through reading but also through writing (Knipper & Duggan, 2006). Students will be able to “infer like a detective (and) write like an investigative reporter” (Frangella, 2012).

4. Office of Catholic Schools and Assessment: Illinois Learning Standards

It is the responsibility of governors and state boards of education to create learning standards. The State Board of Education in Illinois (ISBE) has created learning goals and standards for its schools since 1985 (Archdiocese of Chicago, OCS, 2013). Per diocesan policy, the Office of Catholic Schools in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria has required each diocesan school to align curriculum in the core academic areas (English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies) to the Illinois Learning Standards (ILS).

OCS has provided professional development to assist school leadership and teachers with alignment to the ILS standards during the past ten years. To assess student learning, diocesan school students in grades 3, 5, and 7 are required to take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), 8th grades take the EXPLORE test, and the PLAN (pre-ACT) test is administered in grade 10. The assessment data results help inform diocesan staff, administrators and teachers about the achievement levels of their students and how curriculum gaps are to be addressed in reference to the ILS.

5. Office of Catholic Schools and Assessment: Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative

The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII) was designed to empower Catholic schools with the implementation of the CCSS and the faith/principles/values and social justice themes inherent in the mission of Catholic education (McDonald, 2012). The CCCII supports curriculum development consistent with the CCSS. Catholic schools are a “vital part of the teaching mission of the Church” and therefore, must “provide an excellent academic program within a faith-filled environment” (USCCB, 2005). To give voice to the importance of Catholic mission and vision with academic excellence, the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (Loyola University & Boston College, 2012) were written. These Catholic standards and benchmarks infused with the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative and the AdvancED systems accreditation standards are the framework upon which the Catholic Diocese of Peoria will align its curriculum for the next decade. The domains of Mission and Catholic Identity, Governance and Leadership, Academic Excellence, Operational Vitality, and Continuous School Improvement will serve as the measure for school effectiveness within the core academic areas of our diocesan curriculum.

6. What are the objections to the Common Core?

Much has been written about the CCSS and its impact on our Catholic schools. The criticism of the CCSS appears to be focused on three main arguments: 1) It is a national curriculum that is tied directly to the federal government that mandates what must be taught; 2) Recommended texts will be required and are only informational or nonfiction; and 3) Students will be tracked and entered into a national database for data retrieval and study. Let’s take a closer look at these objections.

First of all, the CCSS is not a national curriculum. The Common Core State Standards are just that: standards. A curriculum, by definition, includes what is taught, when it is taught, how it is taught and what materials to use. These elements are not included in the CCSS. Rather, the Office of Catholic Schools, pastors, principals and teachers will be working together on diocesan curriculum that uses the standards as outcomes, academic expectations or consistent goals that students should meet at the end of their grade level, subject area, or course of work to prepare them for success (OCS, 2013; NCEA, 2013). To remain competitive for college admission and for entrance into a global workplace, students must be prepared for standardized testing and assessment. The SAT and ACT exams are constructed with the CCSS.

Furthermore, the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills has recently been redesigned to include the CCSS, and publishers are writing textbooks with the CC standards as outcomes. If the Catholic Diocese of Peoria were not to integrate these standards, we would not be meeting the needs of our students in regard to their learning or in preparation for the protocols that include these assessments for college or workplace admission.

Secondly, although the CCSS do promote informational and literary text grounded in evidence and fact, the exemplar texts, as listed in *Appendix B* of the CCSS, are not required. The complexity of the level is *recommended*, but the titles themselves are *not mandated*. Teachers may continue to teach classic narrative fiction, poetry and prose, where imagination, beauty, goodness and faith can be explored. Inference and argument may be gleaned from all forms of literature. Administrators of our Catholic schools in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria will have local control and the academic freedom to include Church documents, papal letters, the lives of the Saints, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Holy Scripture, and many other written examples of Truth and Tradition upon which the Deposit of our Faith rests.

Finally, will the privacy of our children be violated if we adapt the Common Core State Standards and would we allow the data collected to be tracked and entered into a national database? Certainly not! Integration of the CCSS/CCCII into the diocesan curriculum framework does not require the collection of any student data that is reported to the government. Current standardized tests taken for college entrance already collect the data without reference to the individual. Collection of data from diocesan standardized testing protocols is for diocesan use only. Data are analyzed and interpreted for continuous school improvement within our system of schools in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria.

7. What's Next?

The Office of Catholic Schools surveyed the principals (October, 2012) and discovered that diocesan schools vary with their knowledge of the CC standards and their strategies for implementation. Principals and teachers have received professional development on curriculum mapping, backward design, and formative/summative assessments within the past 7 years. Diocesan curriculum in core academic areas has not been updated since the alignment with the Illinois Learning Standards.

Therefore, a timeline and framework for curriculum updating and integration of Common Core, AdvancED and Catholic standards and benchmarks will need to be developed. The diocesan teachers' institute (October, 2013) included a keynote presentation of an overview of the Common Core and the Catholic school (Mears, 2013). In preparation for the AdvancED systems accreditation protocol that was recently adopted by the Catholic Diocese of Peoria for diocesan schools (August, 2013), the Office of Catholic Schools recently convened the newly formed Diocesan Education Council (September, 2013) whose main role is: 1) to study and make policy recommendations and 2) to serve as the oversight body for the AdvancED systems accreditation protocols for our diocesan schools. A major task of the Diocesan Education Council for 2014-2015 will be the redesign of diocesan curriculum and alignment to Common Core, AdvancED and Catholic standards and benchmarks. Priests, principals, teachers, parents, community members, and diocesan schools'

personnel are represented on the Council and will be integral in the framing of and carrying out the vision for maintaining viable and sustainable schools in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria.

8. Faith in Our Future

The Office of Catholic Schools, under the authority of the Bishop of Peoria, has great hope in the future of Catholic education in the Catholic Diocese of Peoria. We are committed to be Catholic schools which are centered on the Person of Jesus Christ. We are committed to Catholic schools which contribute to the evangelizing mission of the Church. We are committed to Catholic schools which are distinguished by excellence. We are committed to Catholic schools which educate the whole child. We are committed to Catholic schools which are steeped in a Catholic worldview. We are committed to Catholic schools which are sustained by Gospel Witness. We are committed to Catholic schools which are shaped by communion and community. We are committed to Catholic schools which are accessible to all students. (Boston College & Loyola University, 2012).

We do not take lightly the mission entrusted to us by the Catholic Church. It is a tremendous privilege to share in the education of Her children whose hearts and minds we shape:

“We will never allow our faith and the education of our children to be compromised in our schools. Vigilance and adherence to the Truth, upon which our Church stands and upon which the mission of Catholic education resides, will always be the focus at the Office of Catholic Schools, Catholic Diocese of Peoria” (Weiss, 2013).

May our Catholic schools remain places where God is known, loved, and served, and may the children we educate continue to grow in wisdom, age, and grace for many decades to come. *Amen.*



National Standards and Benchmarks for effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools

Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, School of Education, Loyola University Chicago,
in partnership with Roche Center for Catholic Education, School of Education, Boston College (2012)

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SUMMARY OF DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS AND STANDARDS

Defining Characteristics of Catholic Schools

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
Worldview

Sustained by
Gospel Witness

Shaped by
Communion and
Community

Accessible to All
Students

MISSION AND CATHOLIC IDENTITY

1 An excellent Catholic school is guided and driven by a clearly communicated mission that embraces a Catholic Identity rooted in Gospel values, centered on the Eucharist, and committed to faith formation, academic excellence and service.

2 An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides a rigorous academic program for religious studies and catechesis in the Catholic faith, set within a total academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture, and life.

3 An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities outside the classroom for student faith formation, participation in liturgical and communal prayer, and action in service of social justice.

4 An excellent Catholic school adhering to mission provides opportunities for adult faith formation and action in service of social justice.

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

5 An excellent Catholic school has a governing body (person or persons) which recognizes and respects the role(s) of the appropriate and legitimate authorities, and exercises responsible decision making (authoritative, consultative, advisory) in collaboration with the leadership team for development and oversight of the school's fidelity to mission, academic excellence, and operational vitality.

6 An excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school's mission and vision.

ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

7 An excellent Catholic school has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum

aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction.

8 An excellent Catholic school uses school-wide assessment methods and practices to document student learning and program effectiveness, to make student performances transparent, and to inform the continuous review of curriculum and the improvement of instructional practices.

9 An excellent Catholic school provides programs and services aligned with the mission to enrich the academic program and support the development of student and family life.

OPERATIONAL VITALITY

10 An excellent Catholic school provides a feasible three to five year financial plan that includes both current and projected budgets and is the result of a collaborative process, emphasizing faithful stewardship.

11 An excellent Catholic school operates in accord with published human resource/personnel policies developed in compliance with (arch)diocesan policies and/or religious congregation sponsorship policies, which affect all staff (clergy, religious women and men, laity and volunteers) and provide clarity for responsibilities, expectations and accountability.

12 An excellent Catholic school develops and maintains a facilities, equipment, and technology management plan designed to continuously support the implementation of the educational mission of the school.

13 An excellent Catholic school enacts a comprehensive plan, based on a compelling mission, for institutional advancement through communications, marketing, enrollment management, and development.



Common Core State Standards A Statement by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)

Catholic schools have a long-standing commitment to academic excellence that is rooted in the faith-based mission of Catholic education. The Common Core State Standards in no way compromise the Catholic identity or educational program of a Catholic school.

The Common Core State Standards initiative, begun in 2007, is a state-led, bipartisan effort that is not a requirement for participation in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) or any other federally-funded program, and there are no mandates for any Catholic school to follow any federal rules if they adopt the Common Core. Adoption of the Common Core is voluntary; individual states, Catholic dioceses and other private schools make their own decisions about whether to adopt the standards.

The Common Core State Standards are a set of high-quality academic expectations that all students should master by the end of each grade level. The standards establish consistent learning goals for all students that focus on preparing them to succeed in college and careers in a globally competitive workplace. The standards define and clearly communicate grade-specific goals and inform parents about learning outcomes, making it easier for parents to collaborate with teachers in helping their children achieve success.

The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum. A curriculum includes what is taught, when it is taught, how it is taught and what materials to use. None of these items are included in the Common Core State Standards. For Catholic schools, all of these elements will continue to be determined by diocesan superintendents, principals and teachers working to meet the needs of their students.

The Common Core represents a fundamental shift in the teaching and learning process. The Common Core establishes clear, measurable goals for students that assist teachers in making instructional decisions. The standards place emphasis on creativity, critical and analytical thinking and application to curriculum content. The Common Core is not a national curriculum. It guides the way that instruction takes place in each classroom, allowing the Catholic school to develop its own curriculum content.

An excellent Catholic school provides a rigorous academic curriculum that integrates faith and knowledge. As trained professionals, Catholic school administrators and teachers continually seek the best instructional methods for educating students. In the past, dioceses and schools have developed their own standards or adapted state standards for use with their own curriculum. Some will continue to do this. To assist those incorporating the new standards, the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) and partners in Catholic education established the Common Core Catholic Infusion Initiative (CCCII). CCCII provides resources to design and direct the implementation of Common Core within the culture and context of a Catholic school curriculum. Thus Catholic schools can infuse the standards with the faith, principles, values and social justice themes inherent in the mission of a Catholic school.

Dear Pastors and Principals,

You may have received letters or emails recently from concerned parents and parishioners regarding the *Common Core State Standards (CCSS)* and where our diocesan Catholic schools stand in relation to this initiative.

As Superintendent of Schools, I would like to assure our schools' leadership that the Office of Catholic Schools is supporting the position statement (attached) as outlined by the *National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA)* and the *Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII)*. The Office of Catholic Schools will be vigilant in studying these standards and how they can improve the quality of our academic programs. There are many educationally sound and researched-based elements of the standards that will go deeper and will engage our students with critical thinking skills that reflect academic rigor. Hundreds of Catholic dioceses across our nation are implementing the *Common Core State Standards*; however, as the *NCEA's* position statement says, each diocesan Catholic schools' office has the **freedom** to implement the standards at their own direction.

Simply stated, it is our intent to **adapt** and not **adopt** the *Common Core State Standards*.

We will never allow our faith and the education of our children to be comprised in our schools. Vigilance and adherence to the **Truth**, upon which our Church stands and upon which the mission of Catholic education resides, will always be our focus at the Office of Catholic Schools, Catholic Diocese of Peoria.

We are engaged in a great work. It is a *privilege* to share with you in making our schools places where....

“God is known, loved, and served.”

Sincerely,

Dr. Sharon Weiss, Superintendent

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Diocese of Springfield-in-IL

Aug. 19, 2013

The Common Core and the Catholic School: A Statement by the Superintendents of the Catholic Dioceses in Illinois

Catholic school education is rooted in excellence: our excellence in academics flows from our excellence in faith formation. Both faith and scholarship reflect our mission and our belief in the effectiveness and long-term vitality of our Catholic schools. Without our faith-based mission, we would not be Catholic schools. Without academic excellence, we would not be schools of learning. Without the freedom to accomplish our mission, we would not be true to the Teachings of Jesus Christ upon Whom our Church is founded and upon which our schools stand.

As the Superintendents of Schools in the six arch/dioceses in the State of Illinois, we support the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII), a national working group that involves collaboration between Catholic universities, corporations and sponsors invested in Catholic education, and the National Catholic Educational Association. The CCCII has two goals: (1) to assist Catholic schools and dioceses with the design and implementation of the Common Core standards within the culture and context of a Catholic school curriculum; and (2) to infuse the faith, principles, values, and social justice themes in the mission and Catholic identity of our schools with the Common Core standards (www.catholicsschoolstandards.org). In every sense, CCCII goes “beyond” the Common Core State Standards.

It is within the environment of the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative that we maintain the integrity of our mission and to the expectations of those whom we serve. In themselves, Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum. They do not dictate our curriculum, instructional methodologies, sequence of topics or materials used. What the Common Core does establish are clear, measurable goals and outcomes for what our students should know, understand, or be able to do at the end of a grade or course of study.

Standards are not new to our instructional purpose. Curriculum in our schools previously focused on diocesan curricular standards and the Illinois Learning Standards, which we adopted and aligned to core academic areas. Similarly, the Common Core standards are an outcomes-based vehicle that seeks the best instructional methods for educating our children. In Catholic schools, our constant emphasis on creativity, critical and analytical thinking, and real-world application with a Catholic worldview will guide our students to academic success, and therefore, to college and career readiness. Academic rigor is a commitment that our Catholic schools embrace. The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative does not compromise this commitment.

With the infusion of our Catholic identity, we are in control of the learning process within our schools; it is the *academic freedom* that we enjoy as nonpublic schools. We will determine what to adapt from the Common Core standard according to what best fits our unique mission. We will

never allow the faith and the education of our children to be comprised. Vigilance and adherence to the **Truth**, upon which our Church stands and upon which the mission of Catholic education resides, will always be our focus in the Diocese of Belleville, Archdiocese of Chicago, Diocese of Joliet, Diocese of Peoria, Diocese of Rockford, and Diocese of Springfield in Illinois. Our schools will continue to be places of learning where our primary mission is to ensure our children have an authentic encounter with Jesus Christ.

We support the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative and would encourage our constituents to trust that we will remain true to the mission of Catholic education and to the formation of the children that God has entrusted to our care. Giving young people the tools of college and career readiness has long been a Catholic school tradition and commitment. We will continue to be centers of learning and communities of love.

Sincerely,



Mr. Tom Posnanski
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Belleville



Sr. M. Paul McCaughey, O.P.
Superintendent of Schools
Archdiocese of Chicago



Rev. John Belmonte, SJ, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Joliet



Dr. Sharon Weiss
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Peoria



Mr. Mike Kagan
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Rockford



Mrs. Jean L. Johnson
Superintendent of Schools
Diocese of Springfield-in-Illinois

U. S. Rankings on International Assessments

- **PISA 2009**

(Program for International Student Assessment)

15 year olds assessed

Reading: 14th in the world

Math: 25th in the world

Science: 17th in the world

- **TIMSS 2007**

(Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study)

Grade 4

Math: 11th in the world

Science: 9th in the world

Grade 8

Math: 8th in the world

Science: 11th in the world

Workforce Outlook in US

- **1995: US ranked first in college and university graduation rates**
- **2010: US ranked 12th**
- **American workers in blue collar and administrative support jobs:**
 - 1969: 56 percent
 - 2009: 38 percent
- **Jobs requiring more education and specialized skills (managerial/professional/technical)**
 - 1969: 23 percent
 - 2006: 35 percent

Countries ranked on how well their educational systems meet the needs of a competitive economy*

1. Switzerland	11. Ireland	21. Hong Kong
2. Singapore	12. Lebanon	22. Norway
3. Finland	13. Australia	23. Costa Rica
4. Qatar	14. Malaysia	24. Austria
5. Iceland	15. Barbados	25. Saudi Arabia
6. Belgium	16. Denmark	26. United States
7. Canada	17. Germany	27. Kenya
8. Sweden	18. Malta	28. Brunei
9. New Zealand	19. Taiwan, China	29. United Arab Emirates
10. Netherlands	20. United Kingdom	30. Cyprus

*World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2011 - 2012

Additional Resources

- Common Core State Standards Initiative:
<http://www.corestandards.org>
- Catholic Common Core Identity Initiative:
<http://www.catholicschoolstandards.org>
- National Catholic Educational Association:
<http://www.ncea.org>
- Catholic Conference of Illinois
<http://www.ilcatholic.org>
- Catholic Diocese of Peoria
<http://www.cdop.org>
- Archdiocese of Chicago
<http://www.schools.archchicago.org>