

Education in Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas

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The purpose of the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas is to educate children by passing on our faith through word and action in order to help our students develop a friendship with Jesus Christ and a love for His Church.

How do Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas achieve this?

First, the current policy for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese is to hire teachers who are practicing Catholics and are licensed to teach by the Kansas State Department of Education. In order to be licensed, a teacher must have completed a program of teacher education at an accredited institution of higher education and have successfully completed many hours of practicum experiences, including student teaching, as well as pass a proficiency exam. The purpose of hiring licensed teachers is to help ensure that quality instruction will take place in the classroom. However, it is more critical for teachers to be practicing Catholics (we say "joyfully Catholic") so that they can not only teach about the faith but also witness it to their students. All teachers (including those non-Catholic teachers who may have been hired prior to the current policy) sign a contract and a statement acknowledging that they will abide by the teachings of the Catholic Church in and outside of school.

To assist teachers with meeting those expectations, we have been fortunate for the last several years in our Archdiocese to have the Holy Family School of Faith theologians involved with the ongoing formation of our Catholic school faculties and staffs. These theologians meet with the staffs during contract time to provide for further study and prayer.

It is the responsibility of principals to observe and assist teachers so that they perform both the faith and academic duties as expected. This is especially true when it comes to modeling the faith. Pastors and the staff of the Office of Catholic Schools provide support and guidance to principals to assist them with these supervisory responsibilities. In addition to attending monthly regional principal meetings, the staff in the Office of Catholic Schools provide to school faculties at the request of the principals more than 2 dozen professional development workshops on topics related to educational best practices. The School Office staff also will assist principals with classroom observations and teacher coaching. However, ultimately it is the responsibility of the pastors (in the case of most elementary schools) to see that the principals are properly supervising teachers. The School Office staff assists pastors when requested to do so.

Second, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese follow a curriculum that is compatible with the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSI) but based on Catholic Church teaching. This curriculum has been developed by teachers and principals in our school who also reviewed a variety of other sources, including standards in the state of Kansas, as well as guidelines from various professional organizations in the disciplines (e.g., National Association of Teachers of Mathematics, National Association of Teachers of English, etc.), and directives included from Catholic Church documents at the Vatican and United States province level.

At this point, it may be helpful to explain the difference between standards, curriculum, and instructional resources since often even educators incorrectly use these terms interchangeably. Educational standards are simply a general "road map" or guide for what students should be able to accomplish and usually are articulated by grade level. Curriculum refers to more specific student learning outcomes that are benchmarked to standards and grade levels. Instructional resources are what teachers use in the classroom

to assist students in achieving the learning outcomes. Instructional resources can be a combination of many tools including textbooks, electronic material, media, and other "manipulatives" or objects. However, textbooks are not curriculum, nor are they standards, though sometimes textbooks are incorrectly referred to as curriculum.

To illustrate the difference between standards, curriculum, and instructional resources, this example is offered: a **standard** for mathematics in kindergarten is "Analyze, compare, create, and compose shapes." A kindergarten **curriculum learning outcome** for that standard might be "Identify the characteristics of circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles by describing straight and curved lines, tracing and drawing these shapes free-hand, and explaining the similarities and differences of each shape." The **instructional resources** a teacher might use to help students be able to demonstrate this skill could be workbooks, blocks, computer images, posters, etc. For the past 20 years, teachers have been encouraged to use textbooks as only one resource and not as the only instructional resource since there are so many other valuable tools available today that can better integrate our Catholic worldview across subjects than secular textbooks can.

Third, Catholic schools in the Archdiocese use a variety of assessments including nationally normed tests such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP), and the Assessment of Catechesis and Religious Education (ACRE). In addition, each year some of our schools are selected to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) testing (a long-standing program conducted by an independent organization governed by a board recommended by state education commissioners that randomly samples schools of every type across the country to voluntarily participate in a common assessment of student achievement). Also, our Catholic schools take the Kansas assessments. We monitor results carefully to make sure that all students are achieving to their fullest potential including those naturally gifted as well as those who need extra support. Teachers use assessment results, including the ACRE, to adjust instruction in order to meet students' academic and faith needs.

How do we know if Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas are accomplishing their mission of passing on the faith through academic excellence?

- With regard to accomplishing the faith mission, all schools in the Archdiocese are accredited by AdvancEd, an international accrediting agency that accredits all types of schools across the world, including colleges and universities. The process of AdvancEd accreditation requires schools to demonstrate, in addition to high academic achievement, fidelity to mission. Thus, our schools must provide evidence of Catholicity throughout all school operations and activities. The Office of Catholic Schools refers to fidelity to mission as being "joyfully Catholic" as measured within the framework of curriculum, personnel, environment, and community. The Office of Catholic Schools has provided schools with a rubric for evaluating where the schools are in terms of being joyfully Catholic.
- With regard to high academic expectations and a rigorous curriculum, in addition to AdvancEd accreditation, all of the schools in the Archdiocese also are accredited by the State of Kansas. Msgr. Henry Gardner, who served as Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese many years ago, initiated the requirement that Catholic schools in this Archdiocese maintain state accreditation in order to elevate both the actual quality and perceived quality of our schools.

We have found Kansas to be very respectful of our Catholic approach to education in which our teachers use educational resources that are relevant to the given grade, skill, content and most importantly, support the teachings of the Catholic Church. For example, approximately 25 years ago, Kansas began requiring all state-accredited schools to offer a program of human sexuality education. However, no specific components of such programs were required, so Catholic Schools were (and still are) free to use our approach (i.e., parents as the first teachers, assisted by parish programs such as Project Genesis or Theology of the Body in which virtues are taught in school and biology is taught at home). Another more recent example is the “anti-bullying” requirement. Kansas now requires all state-accredited schools to have anti-bullying programs, but we are free to very explicitly develop our programs around the Ten Commandments, the two Great Commandments, the Beatitudes, Gifts/Fruits of the Holy Spirit, etc. Another example is in the area of crisis plans: Catholic School crisis plans are free to include prayer as a key component of how we handle crisis situations. Despite this, maintaining state accreditation is something we reevaluate each year. Since 2003, we have had at least two formal studies involving principals, pastors, and lay people, of our association with and pursuit of state accreditation. The details of these studies have been communicated to the Archbishop and discussed with his Administrative Team. To date, Archbishop Naumann has supported state accreditation for our schools. However, we strive to exceed state standards, and we are poised to move in a different direction if it were to become necessary to do so in the future.

What does it cost our Catholic schools to be accredited by KSDE? By AdvancEd?

- There are no fees for schools to maintain KSDE accreditation, nor are there fees to take state assessments. For AdvancEd, there is an annual per school membership fee, which is slightly discounted because all of the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese are members.
- Maintaining accreditations requires schools to continually improve practice. These efforts may require additional resources or a reallocation of resources, which schools anticipate and review in their budget processes. This review allows schools to make prudent decisions about expenditures for the next fiscal year. Schools plan annually to fund continuous improvement, including professional development for teachers, upgrading of technology needs, updating instructional resources of all types, especially those with Catholic content. Our schools strive to provide opportunities for everyone to be joyfully Catholic, for students to diligently achieve and become intentionally self giving. School leaders strive to prudently manage their schools and always be forwardly thinking.

What is the perspective of the Office of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas with regard to the Common Core and Catholic Schools?

- We believe that Common Core standards, themselves, can be compatible with the Catholic mission and intellectual tradition since the standards stress the skills of critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication across subject areas. It is important to emphasize here that when we refer to Common Core standards, we refer only to the standards. We do not refer to how these standards were developed and by whom, nor do we refer to any of the supplemental materials in the appendices of the standards. Also, we do not refer to the purpose for education to which the standards are geared, i.e. college and career readiness. The skills mentioned in the beginning of this section (critical thinking, etc.) have been the basis of the history and tradition of the Church's

significant contributions in the fields of science, math, literature, art, and music, to name several. However, another key element that has been a hallmark of Catholic education is the belief that children should be exposed to beauty, truth, and goodness so that their souls may grow in virtue in order to be pleasing to God. There is nothing in the Common Core or in the State Department of Education in Kansas that will require us to divert from this belief or to discontinue our approach to ensuring that our faith is central to every subject and skill we teach. If there ever were to be such a prohibition, we would cease our state affiliation.

- The Common Core Standards are "standards," not a "curriculum." Standards give us a guide to where students' learning should be by the end of each grade level. They do not tell our schools how to teach or what resources to use in teaching. The curriculum of the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas takes into consideration a variety of sources including the Kansas State Department of Education, as well as national professional organizations that recommend such standards, but also and more importantly, our curriculum is aligned with the teachings of the Church regarding the purpose of education as expressed in documents from the Vatican and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Thus, our curriculum goes beyond the minimum requirements of the secular sources, in part by intentionally focusing on what our Catholic faith teaches about the purpose of learning. One feature of the Common Core Standards that does align with our purposes is that students are expected to learn topics in greater depth rather than just recalling basic information. In addition, students are challenged to understand how concepts are integrated across academic disciplines. This cross-disciplinary approach is consistent with authentic Catholic education. We are in the process of revising curriculum for the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas, which is done periodically. When that process is complete, the updated version will be published on the School Office website.
- Classical literature is and will continue to be read and studied in our schools and be enhanced by informational text that will provide more understanding of the setting, the historical events, the art or dress of the period in which the classical literature is written. (In fact, KSDE suggest schools teach a blend of literature and expository text, and the Common Core Standards have specific standards referring to the genres of classical literature, drama, and poetry.) Thus, if a teacher were teaching a unit on poetry, the teacher could select the poem by Robert Frost, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," and have students find relevant scripture, lives of the saints, etc., that reinforce the theme of the poem, "I took the road less traveled and that has made all the difference." Also, students could learn about the geographical setting of Frost's poem, the climate, and the historical time period in which Frost wrote. It is a beautiful, comprehensive way to teach classical literature from the moral foundation of our faith.

Summary Thoughts

The focus of education in Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas will always be the Catholic mission of forming individuals in the image of Christ to become His disciples and the people God intended them to be. The most important outcome for our students is to come to know and love Jesus Christ and His church while also developing their God given talents in order to serve Him and others.

Concerns that have been raised about the Common Core

Content Concerns

Common Core content concerns that have been expressed generally focus on what concepts will or will not be taught and/or when they will be taught, what students will be required to read or not read, and what instructional resources will be required.

Each state approaches academic requirements differently. This is not new with the Kansas adoption of the Common Core Standards. Some states have traditionally required all schools to use the same textbooks and student reading lists. Kansas has never been a state with such requirements, and there are no plans for Kansas to introduce such requirements. In addition, the Common Core standards, themselves, do not direct schools toward any particular resources. We have seen emails containing links that do show specific reading lists; however, a closer reading of the material has indicated that the information either was about how a particular state is choosing to implement the Common Core Standards or the links are referencing the example readings in the appendix of the Core standards, not the Standards, themselves. The Core simply lists text "exemplars" for reading, but these are only suggestions, some of which are based on what has been traditional reading for decades.

Origin Concerns

There appear to be two main concerns regarding the origin of the Common Core Standards: the role of the federal government, with specific issue taken regarding the current administration; and the role of certain individuals, specifically Bill and Melinda Gates and others, whose public stances on social issues are in conflict with the teachings of the Church (and in some cases, the democratic principles upon which this country was founded). We take these concerns seriously and continue to monitor them with respect to how Kansas proceeds. However, it is important to note that some (not all) of what is circulating and oft-quoted contains inaccurate and misleading information with regard to the process of development of the standards, as well as how the standards were adopted by the states. In order to properly monitor any concerns that may be valid, the accuracy of information needs to be carefully evaluated.

Data collection

For decades, our Catholic schools have reported general socio-economic and academic information about the schools to a variety of organizations, including the state of Kansas and the National Catholic Education Association. These organizations use the data to compile educational statistics by geographic region. This data is public and used by many types of research organizations, think tanks, etc. Kansas has indicated that the reporting requirements will not change with the adoption of the Common Core Standards. There is no reporting of political party affiliation, parent occupations, religious beliefs, or other parental/student beliefs and/or attitudes. A copy of what our schools report to the state is attached. Again, if Kansas requirements were to change and such information were to be reported, we would reevaluate our state accreditation.

Concluding Question and Response

Why would Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese take into consideration the Common Core State Standards when revising curriculum?

First and foremost, we believe, the Common Core Standards, in and of themselves, are compatible with the Catholic approach to formation and education, as described previously. From St. Thomas Aquinas to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, Catholics have embraced the interconnectedness of faith and reason. Throughout their history, Catholic schools have been known for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in students. Thus, in a way, the Core Standards simply outline what Catholic schools have stressed for years, i.e., to truly teach in an integrated manner across all academic disciplines. What is different for Catholic schools and what we will continue to do is keep our faith as a central element across those disciplines, as well as remain focused on the fact that our purpose for education goes beyond "college and career readiness." We will remain focused on "heaven readiness."

Secondly, when we compared the Common Core Standards to the Archdiocesan curriculum, we found that the content of the Core matched what we already had been teaching for many years. What was different was the depth and organization of the Common Core standards. Quite frankly, the Common Core standards more clearly describe the skills that are addressed. However, what the Core lacks and what we are free to add is the purpose for learning from the Catholic viewpoint, as well as the specific Catholic influences in each academic area.

Thirdly, the implementation of the Common Core Standards in Kansas to date remains compatible with the mission of Catholic schools in that our schools remain free to teach the Truth as we always have strived to do. We will not compromise fidelity to mission now or in the future.

Finally, to say that the Archdiocese of Kansas City in KS is "adopting" the Common Core State Standards is inaccurate. What is accurate to say is that we are revising our curriculum, according to schedule, and that this curriculum will remain faith-based and appropriate for the Catholic purposes of student learning and formation.