

**Diocese of Baker Catholic Schools**  
**Q & A: Common Core Standards**

*The following document is edited from the Archdioceses of Portland and Seattle in regard to the common core and questions about the use of these standards in our Catholic Schools.*

**What is the Common Core? Where did it come from?**

The Common Core Standards, developed by educators and states across the country, define both the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each grade level in order to be on track for success in college and career. For example, a typical instructional standard for second grade Math is: "Students will measure the length of an object by selecting and using appropriate tools such as rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, and measuring tapes." To read the standards, please visit: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

**How are the Common Core Standards Different?**

The Common Core was undertaken, in part, on account of national research stating that many students graduating from high schools are not prepared for college. Similarly, numerous studies have detailed how other countries are surpassing the United States in the quality of education.

Previously, teachers were asked to meet numerous standards. The Common Core defines fewer standards that are directly linked to success in college and career. Some have called this teaching a "mile deep" instead of a "mile wide, inch deep".

**Is the Common Core a "Curriculum"?**

No. A curriculum includes what is taught, when it is taught, how it is taught and what materials to use. None of these items is included in the Common Core State Standards. For Catholic schools, all of these elements of a school's curriculum will continue to be determined by principals and teachers working to meet the needs of their students.

**Is the Common Core a "National Curriculum"?**

No. The Common Core was developed through an effort among states. The presidential administration, the U.S. Department of Education, and Congress were not involved in the development of the Common Core.

**Aren't the standards part of a federal program? If we adopt them, won't we have to follow federal rules?**

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led, bipartisan effort that is *not* a requirement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) or any other federally-funded program. Individual states, Catholic dioceses and other private schools made their own decisions about whether to adopt or adapt the standards or use state standards that include the common core standards. There is no mandate for any Catholic school to follow any federal rules related to the use of the Common Core State Standards.

**Is the Common Core academically rigorous?**

The Common Core represents an increase in academic rigor for state standards in the subjects of Math and English/Language Arts. However, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baker, which have always taught what the state requires, are committed to doing more. This commitment not only raises the standards of teaching and learning for all subjects, but also includes the teaching of religion, which grounds the mission of Catholic schools.

**Are the Catholic Schools of the Diocese of Baker adopting the Common Core?**

The Diocese of Baker is not adopting the Common Core Standards. What we are doing is requiring our schools to teach to the Oregon State standards. Catholic schools set a higher standard than the state because we are

free to do so and because we believe it is right. Catholic schools **adapt** the state's standards; they do not merely adopt them. They teach a rigorous curriculum in all subjects so that the standards are grounded at all times in content that is comprehensive and integrated with topics pertinent to a Catholic education of the whole person.

Catholic schools in the Diocese are site-based in their management. However, all will be expected to meet and exceed state standards and recommendations from the Office for Catholic Schools.

### **Why adopt the State Standards?**

In Oregon, if you want to graduate from one of the public high schools you will have to show proficiency in state standards that now include the common core standards. This proficiency will be shown in high school when a student's takes the state assessments, takes a test like the ACT or SAT or is able to show proficiency through work samples.

These revised state standards now include the common core standards. These standards establish consistent learning goals for all students. They are relevant to the real world, focusing on the knowledge and skills students will need to succeed in life after high school, in both post-secondary education and the globally competitive workforce.

The Common Core clearly states the goals for students for each school year which assist teachers in making instructional decisions. They help teachers focus their instruction, while allowing Catholic schools to write curricula that can support students in achieving more.

Parents will know exactly what their children should learn by the end of each grade level and it will be easier for parents, teachers and students to work together toward clearly communicated and defined goals.

### **Why don't the standards acknowledge the importance of content knowledge?**

The standards recognize that both content and skills are important in the English and Language Arts and Literacy standards the content includes: classic myths, American's founding documents, classic American literature and Shakespeare. The Common Core Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity; so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts. In math, the standards include: whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals. In addition, the standards ask students to apply mathematical thinking and reasoning.

### **There is no research that shows these standards are effective. Why would we adopt something that is not research based?**

These standards are more evidence based than most previous standards. The research includes the following:

- data on what knowledge and skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs
- assessment data identifying college and career ready performance
- comparisons to standards from high performing states and nations.

In English Language Arts and Literacy, the standards are based on the NAEP Frameworks in reading and writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence. In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from TIMSS and other studies of high performing countries and states.

### **Is the Common Core anti-Catholic?**

No. As a set of instructional standards, the Common Core is neither pro nor anti-Catholic in nature.

**Does the Common Core require Catholic schools to use certain books? What if these books contain messages that are not consistent with the Catholic faith?**

The Common Core standards do include a list of suggested texts for English/Language Arts, entitled "Appendix B". However, as Catholic schools, we are not required to use these books. All books and instructional materials are carefully screened by each school to ensure that they are appropriate, of good quality, and consistent with our Catholic identity.

**What about Appendix B?**

Appendix B provides information to teachers and administrators about possible resources, how assessments might be utilized to measure student learning and possible lessons. None of the materials in Appendix B are required. Catholic school teachers who utilize Appendix B materials will do so after much scrutiny of the materials. As has always been the practice, Catholic school teachers will screen materials to insure that they are in compliance with Church teaching and will only use items from Appendix B that are appropriate for students in Catholic schools.

**Are standardized tests being based upon the Common Core? Will our students take these tests?**

Most significant standardized testing programs already reflect the Common Core, or will reflect the Common Core in the next few years. These include Oregon state tests, the Iowa Assessments, the ACT, the SAT and others.

**The subjects of Math and English/Language Arts have been written for the Common Core. What about other subjects? Will Catholic schools follow the other subjects?**

The writing process is under way for integrating the Common Core standards in Science and Social Studies in Oregon. When they are complete, Catholic schools will adapt them as well. We will meet and exceed these standards while keeping with the principles of Catholic school education.

**What is the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative?**

The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII) is an effort to provide consistent guidelines to Catholic dioceses in adapting the Common Core. For more information about CCCII, see [www.cccii-online.org](http://www.cccii-online.org).

**We want our children to have a Catholic education. By adopting these state standards, what will happen to my school's Catholic identity?**

Archbishop J. Michael Miller in his book, *The Holy See's Teachings on Catholic Schools* (2006), speaks often of the core responsibility of Catholic schools to integrate faith, culture and life. He speaks of the need to recognize that they are schools and thus have a responsibility to prepare students for professional life as well as the virtuous life of followers of Jesus.

Catholic schools must always look for ways for their students to have multiple encounters with Christ each day. There are national efforts underway to assist schools and teachers in an organized effort to provide even more links to our faith while studying various curricular areas, as teachers work towards the goals stated in the standards.

**Has the Diocese of Baker received any money to adapt Common Core?**

No. We have received no funding from any individual, organization, or government entity for adapting the Common Core into our Graded Courses of Study.

**Where can I find out more about the Common Core?**

Common Core Standards: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative: [www.cccii-online.org](http://www.cccii-online.org)