



Going Beyond the Core:

Questions and Answers about Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools and the Common Core State Standards

What are the Common Core State Standards?

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.

Instead, the Common Core State Standards are a set of academic expectations that inform the way teaching takes place in schools. 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 academic expectations.

[\(NCEA Position Statement on the Common Core State Standards, May 31, 2013\)](#)

What is the Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative and how does it differ from the Core itself?

The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII) is a collaborative project involving Catholic universities, corporations and sponsors invested in Catholic education, and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA).

The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative has two goals:

1. To empower Catholic schools and dioceses to design and direct the implementation of the Common Core standards within the culture and context of a Catholic school curriculum
2. To infuse the Common Core standards with the faith/principles/values/social justice themes inherent in the mission and Catholic identity of the school.

In our Catholic schools, the CCCII will operate in conjunction with our integration of the Common Core State Standards.

<http://www.catholicchoolstandards.org/common-core>

What is our involvement with the Common Core?

The Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools are voluntarily integrating the Common Core into our rich tradition because we view the standards as being in the best interest of the children and families we serve.

The use of standards to inform curriculum and classroom instruction is not new for Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools. The current Curriculum Framework posted on the Archdiocesan school website is largely based on the 1997 Illinois Learning Standards. At this point in our journey with the new CCSS standards, it is important to remember that the standards do not tell teachers how to teach or what texts they must teach. In fact, because Catholic schools do not have to meet state requirements (in fact, we exceed them!) for testing and student data collection, they are free to use only those elements of the standards that are in the best interest of their students.

We are confident that our schools will find that the integration of the Common Core State Standards complements the existing expectations for academic excellence that have historically been at the core of Catholic education. By informing parents about learning outcomes, our intent is to make it easier for parents to collaborate with teachers in helping their children achieve success.

The Common Core standards offer a reasonable set of standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics instruction, which our school leaders must examine. Methods for integration of the standards will be guided by the Office of Catholic Schools and principals will continue to have discretion over the selection of instructional materials and strategies. Our goal is to provide a challenging curriculum to all students in the context of our Catholic faith.

([Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools Statement on Common Core State Standards, June 4, 2013](#))

Why are we promising to "Go Beyond the Core" in Archdiocese of Chicago Catholic Schools?

It is right and just for the children and families we serve. Going beyond the standards of public schools has always been a hallmark of our Catholic schools.

We have always had a mandate to teach the whole child in the context of the Catholic community. Our teachers and administrators will continue to "go beyond the core," to find ways to integrate the faith that builds on reason for all of our students. We are canonically required to deliver an education that is as good as or better than public school options. Our parents expect it and our students deserve it.

Does the Common Core conflict with the mission of Catholic schools?

No.

The standards do not require any radical changes in curriculum or instruction. Most high performing, effective Catholic school teachers will find that they have already integrated much of the content and the pedagogical shifts (such as close reading or perseverance in problem-solving) required by the CCSS into their classroom instruction. However, the CCSS will require teachers to move beyond what students *know* to focus on what students *can do* with what they know. This expectation for the application of knowledge complements student readiness for the challenges of the 21st century and does not seem to conflict with the mission of Catholic schools.

What impact will our Common Core integration have on Catholic school students?

We believe our students will benefit by being even more prepared for college and beyond.

We believe that the careful integration of the CCSS into our existing curriculum framework is in the best interest of our college-bound students who attend our Catholic elementary schools and complements the canonical requirement that Catholic schools are as good as or better than public education options. The foundation for college and career readiness must be initiated prior to high school; it is essential that Catholic school students are both academically and spiritually prepared to meet the real demands of college and beyond.

It is important to note that colleges and businesses have reported that many students are unprepared for their education beyond high school and for their future. In 2012, universities reported that half of the 3 million students entering higher education each year required at least one remedial course at a cost of \$7 billion to students. As always, we want Catholic school students to graduate from their high schools ready for the most challenging entry level courses.

What impact will our Common Core integration have on Catholic school parents?

We believe it will have a positive impact.

We encourage parents to look at the standards themselves to determine whether the claims by those who oppose the Common Core State Standards are true. Our study showed that the Common Core will not diminish students' exposure to great works of literature. In fact, the CCSS encourages students to read the classics and primary source materials. As argumentative writing has always been a valued component of a Catholic education, we are pleased by its prominence in the English Language Arts standards.

Rooted in our faith tradition and with an emphasis on academic excellence, we have always had a mandate to teach the whole child in the context of the Catholic community. Our teachers and administrators will continue to "go beyond the core," to find ways to integrate the faith that builds on reason for all of our students. Parents have a right to transparency in expectations and assessments.

What impact does the Common Core have on Catholic school teachers?

We believe it will have positive impact for our teachers.

The CCSS is not a curriculum and does not tell teachers how to teach. Additionally, the CCSS does not articulate all that must or should be taught in schools. It will, however, require teachers to continually examine the quality and efficacy of their teaching.

Our faith-filled learning environment supported by parents coupled with dedicated and knowledgeable teachers remains the key to our academic excellence.

What role has the federal government played in the standards?

Less than you may think.

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. The Common Core standards were approved for adoption by the Illinois State Superintendent and ISBE per their legislated responsibilities. Student achievement of current goals is monitored through the ISAT tests administered each year to public school students in Illinois. (Private school students are not required to take the ISAT tests in Illinois.) The assessments for the Common Core are still being written.

Although the CCSS were developed by private organizations (the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State Officers), the members of these organizations (governors and school superintendents) were not seeking financial profit from the new standards. Additionally, the standards themselves were written by K-12 teachers, post-secondary faculty, state curriculum and assessment experts, discipline area researchers and national organizations. Hundreds of educators were involved in the development of the standards!

Prior to the official publication of the CCSS, the public was invited numerous times to offer their comments on the evolving standards. Over 10,000 individual educators, parents, and community members responded to the standards.

“When the Obama administration came into office in 2009, the Common Core standards were in development, and gaining momentum. We (US Department of Education) set out to support states and districts in changing the conditions that were limiting educational opportunity, and raising standards was a vital part of that.

With governors and state leaders making major progress on standards, we (US Dep’t. of Ed) gave them all the support we could, within the bounds of what’s appropriate for the limited federal role in education.

It was voluntary—we (US Dep’t of Ed) didn’t mandate it—but we absolutely encouraged this state-led work because it is good for kids and good for the country.”

(<http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/duncan-pushes-back-attacks-common-core-standards>)

Catholic schools, however, DO NOT participate in “Race to the Top” nor have they received any Federal funding.

Does the Common core violate the privacy of Catholic school students or their families?

No.

Integration of the Common Core into the Archdiocesan 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.

Will learning be assessed differently?

There may be changes in the content of some of the standardized tests our students take.

Archdiocesan schools currently administer Terra Nova standardized tests to all students in grades 3, 5, and 7. Additionally, all 8th grade students currently take the EXPLORE test. As the ACT and SAT (college admissions tests) will be impacted by the CCSS, the Office of Catholic Schools will judiciously consider a variety of options before making a decision about future standardized testing prior to the expiration of current contracts for these nationally normed tests. Standardized tests provide parents, teachers, principals and other administrators with important information about the effectiveness of instruction in our schools and student readiness for high school and college.

Catholic school students are not required to take the PARCC assessment that will replace Illinois' ISAT test in 2015.

Will the Common Core be more challenging than the Illinois Learning Standards?

Yes.

It is important to note that the impetus for the CCSS was within the college and business communities who regularly reported that high school graduates were not "college and career ready." While our Catholic schools have produced graduates who are ready, it already appears that the new standards have accelerated and deepened academic expectations; it is imperative we take the time to unpack these expectations.

Where can I find more information about the Common Core?

For more information on how we're 'Going Beyond the Core', visit our [Resource Portal's Common Core Information Page](#).

Visit the Common Core website for a detailed [FAQ page](#).