



DIOCESE OF MADISON

OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Common Core State Standards (CCSS): Frequently asked questions

Introduction:

We have received several questions regarding the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their use in Catholic schools in the diocese. Much of the content, knowledge, and skills contained in the Common Core has been used in schools for decades and has been proven educationally sound. In this regard, the CCSS and Diocesan standards contain much similar content, knowledge, and skills (i.e. teaching to tell time and count money in 2nd grade).

It is important to note that the standards do not equate to curricula. Curriculum in Catholic schools aims to educate the whole child in both faith and knowledge, in addition to preparing students to achieve educational standards and benchmarks. Catholic schools will prepare students very well to succeed on Common Core in public middle and high schools, but they will do so using unique curricula that are based on Diocesan standards, share sound content, knowledge and skills with the Common Core, and integrate Catholic faith and philosophy.

1) What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a coherent progression of learning expectations in English language arts and mathematics designed to prepare K–12 students for college and career success. - Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards (2011)

2) Where did CCSS come from and what are the standards based on?

They were coordinated by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State Officers (CCSSO) in 2009, and written by K-12 teachers, postsecondary faculty, state curriculum and assessment experts, researchers and national organizations. The CCSS are based on international benchmarks and educational research.

Common Core Standards were developed only in Reading/English Language Arts and Math. The CCSS may be viewed online at: <http://www.corestandards.org/> .

3) Is it required that all schools nationwide use the CCSS?

No. Adoption of the CCSS was optional. Forty-five (45) states, including Wisconsin, and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS. In these states, public schools are now required to use the CCSS. One state, Minnesota, has partially adopted the CCSS. Four (4) states have not adopted the standards: Nebraska, Texas, Alaska, and Virginia. Religious and private schools are not required to use the CCSS.

4) Will the Diocese of Madison (DOM) adopt the Common Core State Standards?

No, the Diocese will use its own academic standards. While these are different than the CCSS, there are some similarities. Both sets of standards cover basic skills that students should know and be able to do, many of which have been included in school curricula for decades. This leads to many similarities in the skills, knowledge and content that are covered by both the Diocesan Standards and the CCSS. (See question #6.)

5) Why aren't schools in the DOM adopting the CCSS?

Catholic schools have a long tradition of academic excellence. This is derived, not only from holding students to consistently high expectations (i.e. standards) but by our belief that we must work to educate not only the mind, but to form the whole person – body, mind, and soul. We maintain our own academic standards which both reflect the educational best practices included in the CCSS, and allow us to honor our Catholic philosophy and tradition.

6) Will not adopting the CCSS have a negative impact on our students in the Diocese?

No. Academic rigor has long been a hallmark of Catholic schools where the goal is to prepare students to exceed standards, not just meet them. Toward this end, the DOM recently completed a thorough revision of its academic standards in the core areas. This was completed through the combined efforts of teachers, pastors, principals and the Office of Catholic Schools. During this process, many resources were consulted including: our existing standards, individual state standards, standards of national organizations (such as the National Council for Social Studies, etc.) and the Common Core State Standards. Thus, the CCSS served as a resource for, but not the basis of our diocesan standards. Updated standards were written for Religion, Reading, English, Math, Science, Social Studies and Technology and released in 2011-2012. Standards for Art, Physical Education, Health, Music and World Religion will be updated by 2016. This cycle of review and revision will be maintained to ensure that Diocesan standards continue to address the formation of the whole child and serve as the basis for a rigorous curriculum aimed to form and educate students for life in an uncertain, changing, complex and unpredictable future. Diocesan standards will continue to meet and exceed the CCSS, and our Catholic school graduates will be prepared to thrive in schools where

the CCSS have been adopted. The Diocesan standards are available online at:
<http://www.madisondiocese.org/Schools/CurriculumStandardsBenchmarks.aspx>

7) Will students in the DOM be tested on the Common Core State Standards?

Our students are not required to take the Smarter Balanced assessment that is aligned to the CCSS and required of all public school students. Instead of the state test, we use the Iowa Assessment for our students in grades 3-8. The English and mathematics portions of this assessment are being aligned with Common Core.

At the high school level, Catholic school students will not be required to take the ACT, as will their public school peers. However, as taking the ACT or SAT has long been a requirement for college admission, most Catholic high school students will take one or both of these tests. While the ACT will reflect the CCSS, it will not change much. The SAT will align to the CCSS.

Our Catholic schools will continue to meet and exceed the CCSS and our students will be well prepared to succeed on standardized assessments.

8) Will the diocesan standards prepare our students to succeed on these assessments?

Yes. The diocesan standards and benchmarks were informed by the CCSS and other standards. They will prepare students to meet and exceed the Common Core. The Diocesan standards, taken as a whole, serve as the basis for a rigorous curriculum through which students are guided by teachers dedicated to the education and formation of the whole child "...so that the knowledge the students gradually acquire of the world, life and man is illumined by faith." *Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration of Christian Education, Pope Paul VI (1965)*. This approach will ensure that, our students will not only meet, but exceed the Common Core State Standards.

9) Will Catholic schools need to change the curriculum to ensure that students succeed on these assessments?

Not necessarily. Catholic schools students have been routinely scoring above national norms and exceeding national standards for decades. When the diocesan standards were revised, several sets of national standards (including the CCSS) were referenced. This ensured that diocesan standards and benchmarks meet and exceed the requirements of the CCSS. Schools will continue the established cycle of curriculum review and revision around the diocesan standards and benchmarks to ensure that students receive a solid formation imbued with Catholic values that exceeds common standards.

10) Will our schools need to use textbooks and materials aligned to the CCSS?

Since all major educational publishers are aligning their books and materials with CCSS, yes, our schools will use many of these books.

11) Does this mean that teachers will be teaching the “Common Core” by using these books and materials?

As both the Diocesan Standards and the Common Core address similar knowledge, content and skills, schools are teaching knowledge, content and skills that are found in both the Common Core and the Diocesan Standards.

Textbooks and other materials serve as resources for the teachers. They do not serve as the curriculum. Teachers and principals create a rigorous curriculum around the standards, utilizing a variety of resources to address the standards and to infuse lessons with Catholic faith and morals. Thus, while schools address topics found in the Common Core, they also address topics in the Diocesan Standards, and maintain the unique aspects of Catholic education.

12) How will the CCSS affect homeschool families?

At this point, we anticipate that the effect will be minimal, as most homeschool programs use their own textbooks and resources. Families should check with their homeschool curriculum provider to inquire whether or not they plan to align materials to the Common Core State Standards.

As the SAT college admission tests will be aligned to the CCSS, homeschool students who take this test will be assessed on the CCSS. This does not mean that CCSS should be incorporated into instruction, as existing curricula may already exceed the CCSS. While the ACT college admission test will also reflect the CCSS, we anticipate that it will not change much from its current form, so it should not be necessary to adjust curriculum. Families with further questions should contact their curriculum provider.