

The Diocese of Pittsburgh and the Common Core

There has been a great deal of conversation about the Diocese adopting the Common Core Standards. Numerous questions have been raised regarding those standards and their relevance to Catholic education, particularly in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Our educational standards have always been aligned with national standards based on our Catholic beliefs and faith. The review of the Common Core Standards by the Diocese of Pittsburgh means that we look at those national standards as a measuring tool for what all children across the United States are expected to minimally know and learn academically at the end of each grade level.

Our standards have always been built on higher expectations for all students at each level based on our Catholic faith. We ensure there is an alignment of our curriculum as to what all students should know with state standards, national standards and common core standards. We then expand upon these standards in light of our faith.

I can understand the interest in the Common Core and the misconceptions this may create. We have always provided the best, most rigorous and most authentically Catholic education for all the students we serve using the best instructional practices available. As Catholic private schools we are at liberty to use the benefits of the Common Core and avoid any political entanglements with the State and Federal Governments.

Many of the negative comments that have been made about the Common Core Standards are not implemented in the Catholic schools of the Diocese. We determine our own curriculum and what texts and literature we use in our classrooms.

We use Nationally Normed Assessments that do not link to a specific curriculum or set of standards. These assessments link to National Standards recognized by the organizations of the "National Teachers of English" as an example. They are not criterion referenced such as the PSSA or Keystone Exams. We may use our own Keystone-like exams in the future to ensure that our students can exceed any in the state. But we see these assessments as minimum measures rather than measures of competence. We take advantage of all formative assessments so that our teachers receive feedback to improve instruction and to provide our students with a classically instructive, college- ready curriculum.

Our students are not required to take the state electronic or paper and pencil assessment. Our students' individual data and results are not shared with any government organization for data tracking. The proof of our approach is that 100 percent of the students who stay enrolled in Catholic High Schools graduate. Fully 94 percent of these graduates go on to attend four year colleges, including some of the most prestigious colleges in the country.

Our Catholic Schools have a long standing reputation for academic excellence. Most important, we have a proven record for passionately forming and awaking the Catholic faith within our students.