STANDARDS BASED CURRICULUM IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF PORTLAND

"Educating the young generations…in the Catholic school is a serious commitment that must not be taken lightly. It must be duly prepared and sustained through an initial and permanent project of formation that is able to grasp the educational challenges of the present time and to provide the most effective tools for dealing with them within the sphere of a shared mission. This implies that educators must be willing to learn and develop knowledge and be open to the renewal and updating of methodologies, but open also to spiritual and religious formation and sharing. In the context of the present day, this is essential for responding to the expectations that come from a constantly and rapidly changing world in which it is increasingly difficult to educate."

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007)

The Archdiocese of Portland has a long history/tradition of providing a rigorous academic education in an environment where Faith is taught, nurtured and grown. Rooted in our Faith 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 focus on curriculum standards that integrate faith that builds on reason for all of our students. We recognize and hold sacred the responsibility we have as Catholic educators to pass on the Faith.

Over the past several months, concerns have been expressed that Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will have a negative impact on our children's faith formation and /or education within our diocesan Catholic schools. Some have questions about what the CCSS is and what its impact on Catholic education will be. It has become clear that the understanding associated with CCSS needed clarification.

What are standards and how are they a part of my child's Catholic education?

The use of standards to inform and guide curriculum and instruction is not anything new to the Archdiocese of Portland. Since the 1990s, the Archdiocesan standards have been largely based on the State of Oregon content standards and are often used as a valid resource when evaluating and updating curricula standards. Thus, standards should not be seen as intrusive or novel but should be welcomed by all those who support effective teaching that leads to student achievement and growth. Standards are academic

expectations that inform the way teaching takes place in schools. They are a framework of learning goals for all students that clearly define learning progressions from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

In keeping with the mission of the church, that our students have an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education, the Archdiocese of Portland in Oregon will be adapting and aligning the English Language Arts Oregon Common Core State Standards *as they apply* to OUR academic standards, enhancing the academic expectations we have for our students. We have chosen to adapt the standards for many reasons, including but not limited to the following:

- Clear outcomes for what we expect students to know and be able to do in English/Language Arts by the time they graduate (clear learning progressions)
- A focus on critical thinking and higher order thinking skills that require students to move beyond what they know to focus on what they can do with what they know
- A significant improvement in rigor and clarity over the currently adopted English/Language Arts Standards

Does using Common Core State Standards mean that the State of Oregon will be dictating our school's curriculum?

Standards are NOT curriculum; they are simply a framework of academic learning goals we want our students to meet by the end of each grade. Curriculum consists of a specific course of study…what is taught, when it is taught, with what materials and focus. None of these are items included in any set of academic standards. This maintains another wonderful tradition in our schools – "that of autonomy and local site decision making." We are not bound in any way to corporate initiatives or federal funding. Catholic schools are not, and have never been, mandated to use state curriculum or resources, and we will continue to choose our own texts and materials in accordance with our Catholic values.

How will Catholic teaching and values be addressed?

The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative assists Catholic elementary and secondary schools by sharing information, resources, tools and strategies that Catholic educators can use to develop rigorous standards-based, Gospel values-based curriculum for their dioceses and schools. "The entire CCCII initiative from its first moments to the present rests on the reality that Catholic schools use appropriate national and state standards as a foundation for good educational practices. Going beyond those standards to educate the whole child is (both) our responsibility (and our prerogative). Catholic schools cherish each child by giving each child the knowledge, skills, and understanding needed to

transform the world in the light of Gospel values."(http://www.cccii-online.org/). The CCCII 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;
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.

Additionally, we evaluate our curriculum with the help of CCCII Unit Review Criteria which includes the integration of Catholic identity, the integration of effective instructional design, and the integration of common core rigor.

CCCII is fully consistent with the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools (2012) stating that all Catholic schools be both EXCELLENT AND CATHOLIC.

What is the timeline for the implementation of standards in the Archdiocese of Portland?

The Archdiocese of Portland reviews all curricula on a regular basis. We are currently involved in a three year process to analyze the effectiveness of our current English Language Arts Standards, determine which standards we need to add/ delete/adapt from the Common Core Standards to increase the relevancy and rigor of our current standards and begin implementation of new English Language Arts Standards in the 2015-16 school year. While there are critics of the Common Core, many professionals believe they represent a significant improvement in rigor when compared to our currently adopted standards.

How secure is my child's information and what information will be shared about my child?

None of our children's data or personal information will be shared. Any assessment system used in the Archdiocese of Portland is strictly for diagnostic and instructional purposes, not for high stakes or comparisons. Should we choose to implement standardized testing based on the Common Core State Standards, we do it under no obligation to state or federal requirements.

Misconception alert: The Common core is not requiring a massive student data base that will collect over 400 data points to track everything about children and their families because it is illegal for them to do so. They are requesting that the states collect this information and provide it to them.

Conclusion

The Archdiocese of Portland will always use curriculum that forms our students in the Catholic Faith and prepares them for their place in the world. The Archdiocese will continue to review our curriculum on a regular basis, adapting what is important and relevant to our mission. Aspects of common core that support the mission will be adopted. Aspects of the common core that don't support this mission will not be adopted. Concerns that the common core standards in some way compromise the academic rigor and standards of academic excellence are misrepresentations based on assumptions that Catholic Schools will "dumb-down" their instruction. In fact, just the opposite is true.