



# ARCHDIOCESE OF DENVER

OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

## **Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Frequently Asked Questions**

Q. Is the Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools adopting the Common Core State Standards?

A. No

Q. Will this have a negative impact on AoDCS students?

A. No. AoDCS publishes curriculum guidelines in ten subject areas that provide a framework for what students will know and be able to do. It is revised and updated on a regular schedule. This will not change. AoDCS will continue to provide rigorous academics as part of formation of the whole child, preparing students for futures we cannot predict.

Q. Will AoDCS students take the test for the Common Core State Standards (In Colorado, the PARCC)?

A. No. Since our curriculum does not follow the CCSS, AoDCS students will not participate in the assessment.

Q. How else might the CCSS affect AoDCS students?

A. The Common Core will impact textbook publishers and college readiness tests like the SAT and the ACT. Teacher preparation programs at the University level will also be impacted by the implementation of the CCSS. The Archdiocese of Denver Office of Catholic Schools (OCS) will continue to train teacher mentors to assist new teachers with understanding the philosophies and methods that guide instruction in our Catholic schools. OCS will continue to guide new Principals in implementation of curriculum guidelines imbued with a Catholic world view, and to provide ongoing formation for teachers in this area.

Q. Will AoDCS use “Common Core” Textbooks?

A. AoDCS students will use some of those textbooks. We have examined the Common Core and, as we have traditionally done, we have taken what is best from the Common Core and incorporated it into our curriculum guidelines with input from Catholic school teachers, principals, and the Office of Catholic Schools.

Textbooks are a support for professional teachers, not a curriculum in themselves. Teachers and Principals will ensure that the formation of students includes faith formation as well as rigorous academics regardless of the textbooks that are used.

Q. How will parents know that AoDCS students are doing as well as their peers on College readiness exams?

A. The OCR and high school administrators monitor the yearly results of AoDCS students on SAT, ACT, and AP subject tests. These assessment results will continue to inform teachers and administrators about areas for continuous improvement.

### **AoDCS Curriculum Evaluation or Questions**

AoDCS curriculum guidelines are posted on our website ([www.archden.org](http://www.archden.org)). Parents and other stakeholders who have specific questions about one or more of the student objectives posted there are welcome to contact OCS about their concerns or questions at [schoolinfo@archden.org](mailto:schoolinfo@archden.org).

Additional background information and explanation about this issue is included in the White Paper that follows.

### **Background**

Leaders of the Catholic Church have affirmed through numerous documents the critical importance and value of Catholic school education. Regulations at the highest level (Canon Law) indicate that Catholic schools must be as effective as local public schools in transmitting scholastic content while at the same time transmitting the faith. The United States Catholic bishops have supported Catholic schools as the most effective way of transmitting the faith. Archdiocese of Denver Catholic Schools (AoDCS) forms children in the faith and promises them complete personal development and unsurpassed academic success. In order to accomplish this, AoDCS provides curriculum guidelines in 10 subjects to define what teachers are to teach students at each grade level and in each subject. There must be quality assessments aligned with these curriculum objectives to ensure that students know and can do what the guidelines require. Schools must have excellent teachers in place to provide instruction for students using these guidelines and assessments. Catholic identity must permeate the curriculum guidelines, the instruction, and assessments. Curriculum guidelines provide a template for teachers, teachers provide instruction, and assessments demonstrate that learners have achieved unsurpassed academic success. A process of continuous improvement ensures that curriculum guidelines are regularly examined and updated or revised where needed, that teachers use assessment results to improve teaching, that students are provided with learning opportunities at levels that challenge and support each one's academic achievement, and that leadership provides vision, direction, and supervision.

## **What are the Common Core State Standards?**

Ultimately, it is the state government that makes and enforces education policy and provides the funding for public schools through taxation. Recently it has become clear that there is uneven provision in states for academic guidelines and rigor. The federal government has tried to impact public school policy by leveraging the monies that come to schools through federal programs, most notably through the No Child Left Behind Act (the 2002 edition of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act passed in 1965 and the Race to the Top funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (2009). These monies supplement local tax dollars for schools serving families living at poverty level, or are otherwise under resourced. The federal government asked states to design tests for students to ensure that each child would be performing at or above grade level. If students were not performing at that level, then the school would be singled out for improvement measures to ensure that students did, indeed, meet the achievement levels. Non-compliance with these directives would result in schools losing federal funding.

The National Association of Governors, the National Business Roundtable, and The Council of Chief State School Officers collaborated to design a set of curriculum standards that could help all students reach the same base-line goals. This collaboration resulted in the publication of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) issued in April of 2010. Forty-eight states have adopted the CCSS as their state standards; Colorado has adapted these standards and provide the Colorado Academic Standards which replace the Colorado Model Content Curriculum Guidelines. These standards are not a prescriptive pattern for what teachers must teach, but a list of what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade. Local districts and schools must design curricula to deliver the learning that the standards denote. AoDCS never adopted the Colorado Model Content Curriculum Guidelines and will not use the Colorado Academic Standards, but instead designs its own curriculum guidelines. AoDCS has used the recommendation of national subject area organizations, McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning), the work of sister arch/dioceses, and input from teacher practitioners in our schools to compile the AoDCS Curriculum Guidelines. These are many of the same sources used by the designers of government school curriculum guidelines. In many cases, AoDCS guidelines already use some of the same objectives and language used in the CCSS.

CCSS is becoming pervasive and Catholic school students will be impacted by this movement regardless of what we do. Textbook publishers advertise compliance with CCSS. AoDCS

schools may use those textbooks. Assessments are devised for CCSS, and politicians argue about the validity of CCSS. AoDCS students will take such tests as SAT and ACT that will also be taken by students from public schools.

### **Catholic School Response to the Common Core State Standards**

Catholic school leaders understand the reality of the Catholic school in the midst of change.

“New requirements have given force to the demand for new contents, new capabilities and new educational models besides those followed traditionally. Thus education and schooling become particularly difficult today.

Such an outlook calls for courageous renewal on the part of the Catholic school. The precious heritage of the experience gained over the centuries reveals its vitality precisely in the *capacity for prudent innovation* (emphasis added). And so, now as in the past, the Catholic school must be able to speak for itself effectively and convincingly. It is not merely a question of adaptation, but of missionary thrust, the fundamental duty to evangelize, to go towards men and women wherever they are, so that they may receive the gift of salvation” (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, 1997).

One of the 18 Quality Indicators articulated and measured by stakeholders in the AoDCS brand research is “having excellent core curriculum based on national standards.” AoDCS is using the CCSS as one of many resources in reviewing and revising curriculum guidelines. A comparison of the current AoDCS Language Arts Curriculum Guideline and the CCSS revealed that there is already a great deal of commonality between the two documents. AoDCS has been working with rigorous academic guidelines for students for many years. In the latest revision, AoDCS has retained what was already excellent in previous guidelines, has added items from the CCSS and other sources that strengthened the guidelines. In some cases, language was adopted from the CCSS for AoDCS curriculum objectives because it clarified and sharpened the understanding of the objective and the expectation for the students and teachers. This is part of prudent innovation.

### **Assessment of Rigorous Curriculum**

Part of the impetus for devising the Common Core is the mediocre test results of students in the United States when compared to test results of students in other industrialized countries on international tests such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). Designers of the CCSS see one of its reasons for being and positive attributes to be nationwide clarity and consistency in curriculum objectives. The states whose teachers and superintendents helped to write the Common Core and

who have adopted it either wholly or in part, also see a need for an assessment vehicle. Two groups of state education departments are creating a comprehensive test based on the Common Core: the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) of which Colorado is a member. Educators understand that the objectives in the CCSS must be assessed to assure that students know and can do what the curriculum objectives outline. Since AoDCS is not using the CCSS, or the Colorado Academic Standards, we will not use the SBAC test or the PARCC test, either.

How do Catholic school parents, donors, parishioners, pastors, etc. – that is, our stakeholders – know that our schools live up to the promise of unsurpassed academic expectations? AoDCS belongs to two organizations that provide structures to assist leadership in assessing the Catholic identity and academic effectiveness of schools: AdvancED and the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). AdvancED is an international accrediting organization that provides benchmarks for effective schools, and the parent organization for the North Central Association (NCA). AoDCS is accredited as a District by AdvancED, and through the district, each school is individually accredited. After schools and districts have done a self-study, outside evaluators from AdvancED examine 5 Standards: 1) Purpose and Direction, 2) Governance and Leadership, 3) Teaching and Assessing for Learning, 4) Resources and Support Systems, and 5) Using Results for Continuous Improvement. As part of Standard 3: Teaching and Assessing for Learning, schools/district identify what instruments are used to ensure that students are showing growth in achievement related to their adopted curriculum guidelines. AoDCS uses nationally normed tests such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), SAT, and ACT. Schools in the system use other available criterion referenced tests and teacher designed tests. Outside evaluators affirm that through these nationally respected assessments our students demonstrate continuous growth in academic achievement.

NCEA has written *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools*. These benchmarks have 4 Domains: 1) Mission and Catholic Identity, 2) Governance and Leadership, 3) Academic Excellence, and 4) Operational Vitality. These are blended with and used by AdvancED in the accreditation process. Domain 3: Academic Excellence of the benchmarks states “an excellent Catholic School has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with the relevant standards, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction.” Through internal self-study and external quality

assurance reviews, AoDCS and individual schools assure that they are meeting this standard and identify ways to improve.

In 2005, the United States Catholic Bishops noted that “young people of the third millennium must be a source of energy and leadership in our Church and our nation. Therefore, we must provide young people with an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program of education and faith formation designed to strengthen their union with Christ and his Church” (Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, AoDCS students, teachers, and schools are held to a high standard of continuous improvement by a variety of assessment tools, agencies and internal inspection. Catholic schools are not governed by state agencies and are not assessed by them so AoDCS will not be using the CCSS or any government designed assessments. However, our students do enter the marketplace where they will compete with their peers from government schools, and where they will become contributing citizens of the state and the nation. We must ensure that the education provided by AoDCS prepares our students to be personally successful, demonstrate complete personal development and experience unsurpassed academic achievement for futures we can't predict.

September 12, 2013

