

Diocese of Erie  
Catholic Schools Office  
Implementation of Common Core State Standards  
December 2013

Catholic schools in dioceses across the country are now implementing a voluntary initiative called the “Common Core State Standards” developed with support from the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Catholic Schools are exempt from any requirements to adopt these standards, however they are at liberty to adopt what they wish from the Common Core and infuse it with Catholic values and our Catholic identity.

During the school year (2012-2013) the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for mathematics were implemented in our elementary and middle schools. The English language arts Common Core State Standards will be implemented this school year (2013-2014) at the elementary and middle school level. There have been negative comments being made in public forums against the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. This document hopes to address some of those concerns.

The Diocese of Erie did not simply adopt the Common Core State Standards. A process was used that compared our current curriculum standards to the CCSS and then it was decided which standards would put the highest level of expectations into the classroom setting. There is no federal pressure on our Catholic Schools to adopt the Common Core State Standards. No federal funding is being lost or gained by our decision to use the CCSS.

The decision to align with these standards was based on:

- Standards are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Standards are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Standards include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Standards build upon strengths and lessons of current PA state standards;
- Standards were compared to other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Standards are evidence-based.

The Common Core State Standards initiative was introduced by the states as an effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce.

The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school. There may be a shift in emphasis with the CCSS, but that should not imply that our schools will eliminate those experiences that give a student a general background in all areas of study. For example, the CCSS

for language arts increases attention on instructional texts. It is a shift in emphasis, not a removal of fictional literature from the classroom.

The CCSS do not tell a teacher how to teach the concepts, when the concepts need to be taught during the year, or what resources to use to teach the standards. The CCSS do provide the teacher with a concise set of objectives that each student needs to master to successfully move along the educational spectrum. In many cases, the CCSS were one grade level above our current standards.

It has been said that in the past schools in the U.S. have taught a mile wide and an inch deep. Teachers try to cover everything within a school year and not focus on any topics in depth. The CCSS provide fewer standards to cover per year, with the intent that there would be greater focus and depth given to the standards that should be taught. With only 180 days of instruction throughout a calendar year, teachers need to be focused on the learning objectives that are critical to success in the global community workforce and in post-secondary studies.

Please be assured that our Catholic Identity and our mission will never be compromised. “An excellent Catholic School has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values implemented through effective instruction” (\*CCCII). Our schools exist to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We envision education as a lifelong process that can actualize the full human and spiritual potential of all people, calling them to discover, internalize, proclaim, and live the Gospel message and to grow in faith. The Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Erie will continue to prepare students in mind, body and soul by offering a wide variety of experiences that develop the whole child.

If someone has a concern about the CCSS implemented by the Diocese of Erie, we recommend that he read the standards and ask himself if there are any standards that he would not want his child to master. Brochures about math CCSS and English language arts CCSS are available for parents along with all of the particular standards for math and English language arts at the Parent Resources link on the Catholic Schools Office website ([www.eriebcd.org/schools.asp](http://www.eriebcd.org/schools.asp)).

\*CCCII – Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative