

## **Statement on Common Core State Standards in Catholic Schools**

The process of educating children in the Catholic faith is no small task. However, the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Phoenix have been commended for decades on their ability to prepare children as faithful and successful servants. With the sacrifices our principals and lay faithful make to work in our schools, it is indisputable that those employed in our Catholic schools work with the understanding that their first responsibility is to maintain fidelity to our core Catholic beliefs, values, and mission, as well as the specific mission of their individual schools. Our schools make use of the tools that help them to achieve these goals.

Specifically, with regard to curriculum, it is important to understand that the term curriculum refers to the entire experience one receives through a program of study and formation. Students in our Catholic schools follow a curriculum specific to both the mission of our Catholic diocese and to their individual parish and school. Therefore, no public document or institution could ever redirect the goals for education we set in our diocese. The mission is to form disciples of Jesus; we aim to help students understand God's purpose for them in this life and prepare them for eternal happiness in heaven. Common Core Standards provide a list of what all students will need to know in order to do well when tested by such tools as ACT and SAT for college readiness. Will the common core standards make our schools less Catholic because they are government standards? This would be the case if this represented a government takeover of our schools, but it does not. We have always controlled our standards and curricula; we have always treated textbooks as resources to help us on the journey of educating children. Textbooks and secular standards do not replace our Catholic education programs. Nonetheless, in many ways, cooperation with our government has benefitted our Catholic schools tremendously through federal Title funds and tax credits. When we disagree with elements of secular education, such as the absence of the Eucharist and the reading lists approved by the state, then we have the liberty to make our own decisions. We do, in turn, have the best of both worlds.

As we review and revise our curriculum guides, a practice that has been standard in our Catholic Schools Office for decades, we continue to analyze the current national and state guidelines for education. Our teachers and assistant superintendents spend numerous hours dissecting standards and curriculum guides previously prepared within our own diocese and in other Catholic dioceses across the country, as well as national and state standards. We continue to follow our traditional process of developing our own curriculum guides. This process requires teachers and assistant superintendents to develop guides that include Catholic identity intertwined with academic requirements that maintain a standard that is much higher than basic state requirements, whatever those state standards may be. We devise our own reading lists and eliminate those books which do not reflect a Catholic world view. We choose textbooks that supplement the academic plans we develop. In the end, our curriculum guides are our own, developed by those who understand the complexity of Catholic mission-driven teaching. Our Catholic school mission ministry is led by those called by God to educate in the faith. It is with faith and tradition that we will continue to maintain excellence and support the Catholic formation process through the good work of our Catholic schools.

Despite the consistency in the way the Catholic Schools Office has approached curriculum development with fidelity to the church and the process for many years, for the first time our process has been questioned. Clearly, public and political influence has caused a distraction from the focus of the work in our diocese. Whatever the state standards have been called in the past or what they may be referred to in the future (state standards, Common Core, College and Career Ready, Next Generation, etc.), our mission and our process remains. We will always take secular educational standards for what they are and trust in the responsibility of our Catholic educators to see beyond them. With care and precision, we alter, adapt, redevelop, and recreate curriculum standards knowing that we must always seek to improve and meet the needs of today's children as well as the expectations of today's parents. In the spirit of excellence, we are reflective practitioners always recognizing that we are not perfect. We do, however, have a tradition of excellence and generations of successful, young faithful to show for our efforts. With the guidance of God, we will continue in this vein. With humility and faith, we will place God's will first and recognize that without him as the focus of our work, we will be ordinary and unremarkable. We need always to maintain fidelity to our mission, our beliefs, our core values. We will make use of other things if and when they correspond with those.

Finally, rest assured that our Catholic schools office is well informed regarding a large representation of the websites, articles, letters, blogs, Facebook groups, Twitter feeds, editorials, and the list goes on, which provide opinions about Common Core standards. Please remember that the variance of opinions on this subject has been a factor in the widespread confusion and misinformation experienced by so many who have tried to understand this complex issue. With politics, constitutionality, conspiracy, and money all being part of the conversation, we have worked hard to keep God and children at the core of our work. This focus has allowed us to stand behind our work and stand firm in our direction. We ask your continued prayer for the children in our Catholic schools and that all Catholic educators across the country continue to do God's work and fulfill the mission of education ministry for the Catholic Church with excellence and conviction.