

The Common Core and California Catholic Schools A Statement by the Superintendents of Catholic Schools in California

“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)

Catholic schools have a long tradition of providing a rigorous academic education in an environment where faith is taught, nurtured and grown. As Catholic school superintendents in California, we take our responsibility to ensure that this tradition is maintained very seriously. While the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were created primarily for public schools we have concluded after much research, thought and discussion that the rigor and clarity they provide will benefit our Catholic school students and will allow them a better opportunity to excel at a high academic level.

While we recognize the independent value of the CCSS, we also recognize and hold sacred the tremendous responsibility we have as Catholic educators to pass on the faith. The Common Core Catholic Identity Initiative (CCCII which can be found at www.catholicsschoolstandards.org) assists Catholic elementary and secondary schools in integrating elements of Catholic identity (Christ’s Gospel message, Catholic values, Scripture, Church social teachings, encyclicals, etc.) into curriculum and instruction based on the CCSS. In every sense, the CCCII goes “beyond” the Common Core State Standards. Embracing the goals of the CCCII we support the implementation of the Common Core State Standards within the culture and context of a Catholic school curriculum; an approach which will infuse the Common Core State Standards with the faith, principles, values, and social justice themes inherent in the mission and Catholic identity of our schools.

Standards in Catholic schools are not new. Since 1997, most Catholic schools in California have provided instruction based on the California State 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 a roadmap of educational benchmarks – the destination where we want students to ultimately arrive. They are not curriculum, which is a specific course of study, and can be viewed as the vehicle we drive to reach the destination. In our professional view, the CCSS provides a clear roadmap of academic expectations, allowing students, parents and teachers to collaborate in reaching these goals by choosing to implement the curriculum they deem most effective for their individual school. This maintains another wonderful tradition in our schools that of autonomy and local site decision making.

We strongly support the CCSS because they add clarity to the teaching and learning process while also adding more rigor as articulated by university readiness standards, most notably the UC system. Not teaching to these new standards will put our students, collectively, at a disadvantage in the college testing and application process. They more clearly align what is taught from grade to grade in order to provide the knowledge and skills necessary for our students to collaborate and compete with their peers. The CCSS do this, in part, by providing for deeper analysis, text-based responses, and critical thinking for English Language Arts (ELA) and an integration of conceptual understanding, computation, and application for math. The CCSS give guidance and a clear direction to best prepare our students for success in college and careers.

We want to stress that Catholic schools are not, and have never been, mandated to use state curriculum or resources and they will continue to choose their own texts and materials in accordance with Catholic values. Catholic Schools in California have always ensured that the standards that guide instruction in the classroom are infused with our Catholic faith. All we do in Catholic schools is within the context of our individual and communal relationship with Jesus Christ and all that is taught in Catholic schools is from a Catholic worldview and infused with strong Catholic identity.

As professional educators who are committed and dedicated to Catholic schools, we have spent years researching, studying and analyzing which resources and materials are most effective in engaging students in the learning process, both from an academic perspective and a faith perspective. The CCSS infused with the CCCII will provide our teachers and schools greater opportunities to provide rigorous academic instruction in the nurturing environment of our Catholic faith. Most importantly, they will better prepare students to achieve their individual, God-given potential and become leaders in both our Church and society.

Kevin Baxter, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Elementary Schools
Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Msgr. Sal Pilato
Superintendent of High Schools
Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Maureen Huntington
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Archdiocese of San Francisco

Rick Sexton
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Fresno

Kathleen Radecke
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Monterey

Sr. Barbara Bray, SNJM
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Oakland

Greg Dhuyvetter
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Orange

Rick Maya
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Sacramento

Patricia Vesely
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of San Bernardino

Tom Beecher
Director of Schools
Diocese of San Diego

Kathy Almazol
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of San Jose

John Collins, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Santa Rosa

Tom Butler
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Stockton