Dear Catholic School Parents and Guardians,

Catholic schools are both centers of evangelization that proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ and centers of academic excellence that rigorously prepare students to be life-long learners, leaders and contributing members of this world and the world to come.

The ability of our Catholic schools to design and implement a curriculum that prepares students for heaven and earth, free from government oversight, is constitutionally protected. Our schools do not have to meet state or national requirements for curriculum, testing or data collection. We are, however, accountable for helping each student develop their God-given gifts and instilling in them the importance of using their gifts to serve God and serve others.

Our Catholic schools continue to outperform their public school counterparts in both test scores and graduation rates. We have for many years adapted what is good about state standards and curriculum into our own programs. We always begin by evaluating standards through our mission to form disciples and our Catholic philosophy of teaching our young people the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We initially blended the Colorado State Standards with the Core Knowledge Sequence because we value the Classical approach to learning. We recently purchased social studies books from the Catholic Book Project as resources for our teachers because it is important for our students to learn about great Catholic leaders and the important role the Catholic Church has played in the history of our nation and world. Infusing faith and values in all we teach, say and do is what makes our schools Catholic!

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) developed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) are the latest generation of standards to be introduced. Because CCSS were not developed specifically for Catholic schools, there is concern about the effect these standards will have on Catholic schools. For both political and academic reasons there has been a great deal of local and national debate about the origin, quality, purpose and effect of CCSS. Proponents believe that CCSS provide a set of common, more rigorous, career-ready internationally benchmarked standards. Opponents believe that CCSS have resulted in federal overreach into schools, loss of parental choice and a loss of academic rigor. The two opposing views have created confusion, misinformation and misunderstanding.

The Catholic schools in the Diocese of Colorado Springs are reviewing and adapting the CCSS like we have all others, through a Catholic lens. Our current standards were formed by adapting the Colorado State Standards and the Core Knowledge Sequence and then blending the two. Since the release of the CCSS we have begun the process of evaluating, adapting and blending those standards that support our mission and academic goals with our existing standards.
An independent agency has evaluated all of the state standards and the new CCSS. Some state standards (IN, MA, and TX) were rated higher in academic rigor than the CCSS in certain areas. We will eventually evaluate those state standards, again with our religious mission and academic goals in mind, and see if they merit adaptation and inclusion. Developing standards and curriculum is a process, and our Catholic schools are not bound by a national timeline or financial incentive.

Evaluating, adapting and infusing standards with Catholic values have proven a successful approach. Academically, 99% of Catholic school students graduate from high school on time and most go on to successfully complete postsecondary education (NCEA, 2104). Spiritually, students who attend Catholic schools for eight or more years are more likely to attend weekly Mass, seriously consider a religious vocation, pray on a regular basis, and more likely to remain Catholic as adults than Catholics who do not attend Catholic schools (Gautier, 2013). We will continue to succeed and improve by evaluating and adapting standards, curriculum and instructional strategies that support our mission and goals.

One of the strengths of Catholic schools is that there is great latitude at the local level to determine standards, curriculum and textbooks. Principals and teachers in our Catholic schools are acutely aware of the importance of selecting textbooks that support the mission and purpose of our Catholic schools. Most textbook companies rewrite textbooks on a multi-year cycle, but currently many of the companies have rewritten their textbook series to align with the public school mandated CCSS. Our schools have or will purchase some of these series and text books, and they may include examples or activities which do not align with our Catholic values. We are not bound to, nor will we ultimately include such material. Because most series have been recently rewritten, we will establish an ongoing review committee and process to screen textbooks. Until our teachers become familiar with all the examples and activities in each new series, a review committee of Catholic educators will be established at each school. Educators and parents may submit items for review by the committee to be sure they align with our Catholic values and approach.

Our Catholic schools are not adopting the Common Core State Standards or any set of standards in their entirety. The current standards are a compilation of Colorado State Standards, the Core Knowledge Sequence and the Common Core State Standards. We will continue to evaluate and adapt standards that have been identified as academically more rigorous. We are not adopting the suggested reading (Appendix B) from the CCSS and will continue to incorporate Classical Literature and the Lives of the Saints on our required reading lists. We receive no financial incentive to adopt standards, and we are not required to take the test mandated for public schools. We will continue to take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). The current curriculum in our Catholic schools is based on standards that meet our Catholic mission and academic goals. Mission, faith, credible research, educational expertise and parental input will continue to be used in our decision making process as we partner with parents to prepare our students’ minds for tomorrow and their souls for eternity.

Sincerely,

Holly Goodwin
Superintendent of Catholic Education
Diocese of Colorado Springs

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