

Curriculum Design - Understanding Diocesan Curriculum Process and Focus
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Curiosity, creativity, interdependence, and technology, infused in a rigorous content and imbedded in the ideals and traditions of the Catholic faith are the hallmarks of the diocesan curriculum.

Curriculum at its simplest is understood to be a set of learning goals and content objectives articulated across grade levels. At its broadest, curriculum can be defined as the totality of a student's experiences that impact learning. This includes directed learning, conversations, assessment, peer and teacher interactions, and research, as well as co-curricular activities including the performing arts and athletics. It is this broader definition that guides the development of curriculum in the Diocese of Trenton.

The *National Standards Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* define an excellent Catholic school as one that has "a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction". (NSBCESS Domain 3, Standard 7, 2012) According to the NSBCESS, the essential elements of "an academically rigorous and doctrinally sound program" mandate curricular experiences—including co-curricular and extra-curricular activities—which are "rigorous, relevant, research-based, and infused with Catholic faith and traditions". These essential elements provide a framework for curriculum development in the Diocese from prekindergarten through secondary school.

During October, the Department of Catholic Schools and the diocesan curriculum committees will be presenting three newly revised curriculums: an Affective Early Childhood Curriculum (PreK-3), World Language (PreK-12), and English Language Arts (PreK-12). A revised Science Curriculum (PreK-12) based on the *Next Generation Science Standards* and a new curriculum for Trigonometry and Pre-Calculus are in process and will be presented to administrators and teachers in the spring of 2019.

With the start of the new school year, two new curriculum committees will be formed to revise the Social Studies and Educational Technology curriculums. These revisions will be based on the newly published *National Social Studies Standards* and the International Society for Technology In Education (ISTE) *Standards for Students*. All curriculum developed in the Diocese is based on national standards as well as current curricular research, aligns with the New Jersey Student Learning Outcomes and draws on the expertise of our teachers and administrators.

The format of the curriculum guidelines varies according to the subject area. However, all guidelines incorporate specific essential elements including a vision and mission statement, learning outcomes and objectives, benchmarks, and suggested strategies for assessments and instruction. This structure provides guidance for teachers while encouraging them to implement their own assessment and instructional strategies.

There are diocesan curriculum guidelines for religion, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science, Physical Education, Fine Arts and Library Media Development.

For example, the vision of the newly revised English Language Arts curriculum is to prepare all students in all disciplines to become "*lifelong learners, to read widely and deeply, to become culturally literate, to use written and verbal communication, to express opinions, to demonstrate critical analysis and to convey meaningful experiences while infusing the tenants of the Catholic faith*" (ELA Curriculum, DOT 2018). The document goes on to present benchmarks, examples of formative and summative

assessment, and instructional strategies. This document is a skills-based curriculum that defines grade level benchmarks in reading (literature and informational texts/non-fiction), writing, speaking and listening, integrating the Gospel values of the Catholic Church.

The data collected from the IOWA Assessment scores is reviewed to ensure that any concept that needs to be strengthened is highlighted in the guidelines. The National Percentile score for Language Arts and Reading are always higher than 70% of the students across the nation. English Language Arts concepts are noted as a strong attribute of a Catholic education.

At the high school level, diocesan curriculum provides an overarching direction for content but individual course syllabi are developed at the local level and approved by the principal and academic council of each secondary school.

As leaders in curriculum development and design, we recognize that our students are growing up in a global environment that will require new skills as well as new knowledge. As we design and revise curriculum, we will continue to incorporate an emphasis on both the hard skills (content knowledge, the ability to collect and analyze data, proficiency in a foreign language) and soft skills (communication, problem solving, teamwork, time management and leadership) that will be essential to our students' success in the future.

On behalf of the members of the Department of Catholic Schools, we express our deep gratitude for the generosity and expertise of all of the teachers and administrators who offer their time and talent to research and design curriculum.