



Catholic schools have a long-standing tradition of academic excellence tied to their mission of spiritual and academic formation. In fact, Canon law mandates that Catholic schools provide a program of instruction that is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area (Canon 806, #2). It is clear that the vitality of Catholic schools is irrevocably tied to the academic quality of the institutions. Recognizing the need for academic quality, the Diocese of Sacramento has begun two recent initiatives: adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and implementation of a high quality system of data-driven instruction.

Why Common Core?

Since their creation in 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been voluntarily adopted by public schools in at least 45 states and are being considered or are in the process of implementation by over 100 Catholic (arch)dioceses. **The Diocese of Sacramento will be counted among the first Catholic school systems to fully implement the standards.**

The CCSS initiative was motivated by several factors, including a desire to better prepare all students for college and careers, to make students more competitive on international measures of academic achievement, and to minimize differences among states with respect to learning expectations at each grade level. The standards were developed by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) with input from teachers, parents, school administrators, and educational experts from across the country.

Common Core standards are a clear set of high-quality goals and expectations for what students should know and be able to do in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level. They emphasize critical thinking, application of knowledge to authentic contexts, and creativity. The standards are internationally benchmarked and based on scholarly research and evidence to align with expectations for college and career success. For example, the creation of the standards was informed by analysis of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing, Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) studies, and comparisons to standards from consistently high performing states and nations.

The CCSS do not dictate how teachers should teach, nor do they mandate any specific curriculum. They simply establish common, rigorous goals for what students need to learn. The Diocese of Sacramento will continue to select curriculum and assessments, and teachers will continue to tailor instruction to the individual needs of their students. The standards will in no way interfere with the Catholic identity and religious education and formation elements of the schools. With the CCSS, all students will be held to high academic expectations. With proper

training and support, teachers will be able to implement teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply their knowledge. Our Catholic mission of preparing students academically for their place in the world will be better fulfilled through adherence to these new standards.

Why data-driven?

With the shift to the new Common Core State Standards, we now have clear, rigorous goals for what students must learn at each grade level. But how can we be sure that students are, in fact, meeting these standards? One way is by practicing data-driven instruction, including careful analysis of student performance data on interim tests that are used to assess students' attainment of standards.

Many schools use norm-referenced testing, such as the ITBS tests, to assess students' performance relative to a national sample. This information is helpful in determining how students compare to students taking the same test in different parts of the country. However, norm-referenced achievement data does not provide evidence that students have mastered any particular standards.

Standards-based assessments, on the other hand, are designed specifically to track students' mastery of skills and concepts directly aligned to the standards and curriculum. This information can be used formatively to identify gaps in knowledge, provide remedial support, and adjust instruction accordingly in order to ensure that all students are learning what they need to know and be able to do. Standards-based assessments, administered quarterly, are an important component of a system of data-driven instruction.

An effective system of data-driven instruction includes an ongoing cycle of assessing students on an interim basis, accurately analyzing test results in a timely manner, and making appropriate adjustments to teaching based on the data. Practicing data-driven instruction empowers teachers to make instructional decisions based on real-time performance of students in relation to the standards to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. It enables teachers to reach all students with the appropriate levels of challenge and support to help them succeed to the best of their abilities.

Through the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and the practice of data-driven instruction, the Diocese of Sacramento schools aim to hold students to high academic standards and to track their attainment of those standards in accordance with their mission as Catholic schools.