

Guidance for Implementation of Catholic Curriculum Standards

This implementation guide has been developed to assist curriculum leaders desiring to incorporate some or all the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* into a school's existing set of academic standards.

Standards

Standards are statements indicating what students should know (content), do (skill)¹, and/or be like (disposition).² They are broad statements that do *not* prescribe instructional methodology, but do guide curriculum decision-making, as well as the creation of classroom and standardized assessments.

Catholic Curriculum Standards

The *Catholic Curriculum Standards* (CCS) were created to complement standards already used in schools as well as to function as a set of foundational standards for Catholic instruction in English language arts, history, science, and mathematics. They are not designed to replace a full set of academic standards; they would be woefully inadequate in this regard. The standards should be viewed a set of **exit level** standards for grades 6 and 12.

The CCS were built upon the framework of five key components upon which the general standards are fully situated and upon which the other standards relate. These key components are:

1. Involves the integral formation of the whole person, body, mind, and spirit, in light of his or her ultimate end and the good of society.³
2. Seeks to know and understand objective reality, including transcendent Truth, which is knowable by reason and faith and finds its origin, unity, and end in God.⁴
3. Promotes human virtues and the dignity of the human person, as created in the image and likeness of God and modeled on the person of Jesus Christ.⁵
4. Encourages a synthesis of faith, life, and culture.⁶
5. Develops a Catholic worldview and enables a deeper incorporation of the student into the heart of the Catholic Church.⁷

¹ McMillan, J. (2014). *Classroom assessment: Principles and practice for effective standards-based instruction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

² Marzano, R. (1996). Eight questions about implementing standards-based education. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 5-6. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED410230.pdf>

³ *The Catholic School*, 36, 47, 49; *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1, par. 1; USCCB. Seven themes of Catholic social teaching.

⁴ *The Catholic school*, #41.

⁵ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 52, 56; *The Catholic School*, 55.

⁶ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 52; *The Catholic School*, #37.

⁷ *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 71, 74-77; *The Catholic School*, 50.

Implementation Plan Guidance

Schools that have already identified the need to enhance their Catholic identity through curricular changes should take some time to develop an explicit plan which will guide the implementation process. The first step is to identify leadership, which may or may not be the head of school. The leader's duties will include the creation of an implementation plan, the plan's rollout, and its eventual evaluation. A proposed pacing guide to encompass the total plan and the scope of the project should be determined. Projected financial needs should be estimated and budgeted as the plan is developed. Once the scope of the plan is identified, a teacher representative from each grade level should be identified. These teachers will form the curriculum renewal team and be responsible for creating the implementation plan which may include revisiting the school's total program goals and objectives to ensure the new Standards are in line with the school's mission, vision, and philosophy, revisiting and editing as necessary course of study goals and objectives, learning outcomes and authentic tasks for each grade level, the development of criterion-referenced tests as needed, and revisiting and selecting textbooks and learning materials to accommodate the new standards.

Once the standards revision is complete, an in-service for all teachers is planned where the overview of the new curriculum is presented with a practice profile presented. The practice profile highlights in detail the expected changes to be made by teachers to achieve full program implementation. Teachers should be shown how to create a unit with the new materials and then how to move this to their daily lesson plans. Teachers can then work together to create additional units with cross-curricular activities. Sharing of successful units and lessons should be encouraged. Care should be taken that implementation is not evaluated immediately allowing time for teachers to merge theory with practice.

With that said, teachers should be provided curricular support throughout the first full year of implementation with no changes to the Standards or requirements until after the program evaluation. Curriculum leaders and administration should work closely with teachers to help them overcome challenges and to provide ideas and insights into the demands of the new Standards. Staff development can include discussions devoted to an analysis of the new standards and their effects on students. Additional background information on concepts contained in the Standards should be provided to the teachers. Faculty can use the resources on the Cardinal Newman Society website for additional background information.

Administrative leaders should apprise parents of the curriculum changes they will see in the new program and the rationale behind the changes. Parents should be invited to a curriculum night or information can be sent home discussing the new Standards and their connection to Church documents.

Practical Considerations

Some diocesan curriculum standards or frameworks might already be built around a set of similar Catholic components, in which case it is recommended to compare the existing components with those presented here in order to more fully ground the program (if necessary) in the educational teachings of the Catholic Church. It is recommended to use the five key components of the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* if a framework does not already exist.

Once a Catholic framework is in place, a review of existing standards in each academic discipline is necessary. Integrating this review with an existing rotation of curricular reviews based on academic disciplines is possible. For instance, if you will be reviewing the mathematics curriculum in the coming year, then beginning with the *Catholic Curriculum Standards* in mathematics would be the first step.⁸

Individual curriculum designers might choose to place the standards at the grade level where they, in their professional experience, best believe them to fit or they might create a curriculum design committee to review and decide on placement. If a committee approach is used, it should be broken into sub-groups based on each academic discipline with a team member representing each grade level (e.g., English language arts team members from grades 1-6 or English teachers from grades 7-12). Whether completed individually or through committee work, the process of review and placement of the standards is the same.

First, read the selected quote taken from one of the Church documents in the header of the standards to orient yourself to the Church's teaching and the standard's emphasis for that particular discipline. Read the general, intellectual and dispositional standards to get an overall sense of the length, tone, performance requirements, and content for the discipline.

If there is unfamiliarity with any content contained within a standard, reference tables are located at the back of the document with citations for review. Most all standards have citations. These citations are primarily from the Church's teachings on Catholic education and most are easily accessible online.⁹ Additional, and more in-depth, resources for each academic discipline as a whole, are also available in the appendices (see Appendices C-F). A discussion of truth, beauty, and goodness can be found in Appendix A.

After the content or required performance of the standard is understood, the targeted level of cognitive complexity should be identified by analyzing the verb used in the standard. This will provide an indication of where this standard would most appropriately fit in the K-6 or 7-12 levels. One might find more complex thinking required of older students than younger ones, yet there are exceptions.

The K-6 and 7-12 standards were designed with the idea that most students should be able to attain each standard by either 6th or 12th grade. Curriculum designers are free to move the standard to a grade level where, in their experience, most students can attain the standard. Schools that graduate students at 8th grade might not be able to incorporate all of the 7-12 CCSs. Similarly, K-12 schools might prefer to move some of the CCSs from K-6 to the 7th or 8th grade. As these standards are only suggestions, and act as a complementary set of standards, movement, based on professional experience and the desire to ground teaching and learning more deeply into the heart of the Church, is expected. Practitioners might want to introduce standards in only one academic discipline at a time or choose several well-understood standards in each subject area.

⁸ Notice there is not a set of Intellectual standards for mathematics. Intellectual standards have been included in the General Standards for this content area. Primarily dispositional standards have been added to this academic discipline.

⁹ See also *Church Documents for Catholic School Teachers - Annotated Bibliography* at <https://cardinalnewmansociety.org/catholic-curriculum-standards-full-resource/#ChurchDocuments>

At this point, most teachers should be able to transition the standard to an educational objective or learning target. As these are nascent standards, and their content and approach is unique to Catholic education, innovation and creativity with their implementation is not without question. Some of the standards might require the creation of developmental learning progressions in order to more fully attain their demands. Others might not.

Plan Evaluation

When a course of study has been fully operationalized, and as designated in the implementation plan, evaluation of the course of study can proceed using the following criteria¹⁰:

1. *Vertical curriculum continuity*: The course of study reflects a K-12 format that enables teachers to have quick and constant access to what is being taught in the grade levels below and above them.
2. *Horizontal curriculum continuity*: The course of study developed provides content and objectives that are common to all classrooms of the same grade level. Also, daily lesson plans reflect a commonality for the same grade level.
3. *Instruction based on curriculum*: Lesson plans are derived from the course of study, and curriculum materials used are correlated with the content, objectives, and authentic tasks developed.
4. *Curriculum priority*: Philosophical and financial commitments are evident. Clerical assistance is provided, and reasonable stipends are paid to teachers for work during the summer months.
5. *Broad involvement*: Buildings within the system have teacher representatives on the curricular committees. Principals (or designees) are represented; and school board members are apprised of and approve the course of study.
6. *Long-range planning*: Each course or program is included in a review cycle.
7. *Decision-making clarity*: Controversies that occur during the development of a program center on the nature and decision, and not on who makes the decision.
8. *Positive human relations*: All participating members are willing to risk disagreeing with anyone else; however, communication lines are not allowed to break down.
9. *Theory-into-practice approach*: The school's philosophy, vision, mission, graduation outcomes, program philosophy, rationale statement, program goals, program objectives, learning outcomes, and authentic tasks are consistent and recognizable.
10. *Planned change*: Tangible evidence shows that the internal and external stakeholders accept the developed program/course of study. The process of developing a course of study for each discipline is no longer one of determining how to do it, but one of determining how to do it better.

¹⁰ These criteria are excerpted (with a few wording changes) from Bradley, L. H. (1985). *Curriculum leadership and development handbook*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Criterion-based evaluation

In addition to evaluating the implementation of the plan, teachers can assess their criterion-based assessments to determine how well students grasp the concepts presented in the Catholic Curriculum Standards, for instance how well students are able to explain the unity of faith and reason, whether they can share how the beauty and goodness of God is reflected in nature or demonstrate an understanding about great figures of history examining their lives for examples of virtue or vice.



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