

NEW MATH CURRICULUM FAQ

The following list of Frequently Asked Questions and answers was developed prior to the start of the school year in anticipation of questions parents may have about the latest curriculum review for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore for the 2013-14 school year. It has been updated to reflect questions and comments received by the Archdiocese and/or school principals since the beginning of the school year. As further questions and/or the need for clarification arise, this document will continue to be updated. Updates will be made available to school principals for sharing with parents and the online document (www.archbalt.org) will also be updated.

Additions as of 10/4/13

1. Are Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore adopting the Common Core Standards?

No, however, as with any curriculum revision, the most current national and/or state standards are utilized to ensure that our curriculum meets or exceeds these standards. Only those elements deemed to add value and increase rigor to Catholic schools' already-rigorous curriculum are adapted for inclusion.

2. Does this mean our students will be learning from the same textbooks as public school students? Do all Catholic schools use the same textbooks?

Continuing with current practice, each local school leadership team selects textbooks that are in alignment with the curriculum that is being taught, and that meet the needs of the students in their school. Textbooks are used as a tool to support curriculum and a variety of instructional materials are also used to provide a well-rounded education. Therefore, no single textbook is mandated.

3. Will the inclusion of these Common Core elements lower our schools' academic standards?

Absolutely not. In fact, the purpose of any curriculum review and any resulting changes is to raise academic standards and further challenge students by determining how the classroom experience can be improved so that teachers can more effectively help students master the material that is taught.

4. Are Catholic schools only incorporating elements of Common Core because of government money and/or interference?

No. The Archdiocese of Baltimore does not participate in the “Race to the Top Common Core and Teacher Effectiveness Grant.” It is the long-standing practice of Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore to review the current subject-specific national and state guidelines and standards during any curriculum review. When developing curriculum, it is most important that our unique Catholic identity be infused in our teaching, principles, and our values. Our curriculum is developed and revised by a curriculum leadership team (master teachers from schools selected by principals) and staff from the Department of Catholic Schools.

5. If Catholic schools are including Common Core elements how are they different than public schools? Will these new standards “hold back” students who are excelling and more quickly mastering lessons?

The Catholic school curriculum has always been rigorous and college preparatory. Catholic schools continue to develop and enhance best practices in Catholic education to make classrooms centers of excellence. For example, the new Catholic school math curriculum meets or exceeds the current standards. In each classroom, differentiated instruction can be put in place in order to meet the needs and develop the potential of each child. In each school and in each classroom, active learning takes place, and pacing is adapted to the skill levels and abilities of each child. The pacing of the lessons is adjusted so that the concepts are covered and thoroughly mastered. Students build mathematical skills based on their understanding of the concepts, and they connect and apply their existing knowledge base to new and more challenging learning. As students develop 21st century learning skills, they will be more effective participants in society and will move forward with a Christian vision and purpose in this modern world.

6. Is the math curriculum being weakened, especially in the middle school grades?

The middle school math curriculum is strong in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, as reflected by student achievement and standardized test scores. As students gain requisite skills in order to master more challenging math courses, these courses are made available to them as they move through middle school and prepare for high school and beyond. Advanced mathematics courses are offered at the discretion of each school where it is deemed appropriate in order to continually challenge and meet the needs of students. Catholic schools will continue to utilize the best instructional practices and provide students with the most up-to-date resources.

7. Will the impending curriculum review for English-Language Arts mean Catholic schools no longer will teach the “classics” in literature?

While we have not yet begun the review process for ELA, any revisions to the English-Language Arts curriculum will ensure a commitment to the tradition of academic excellence in reading/literature, writing, listening, grammar and spelling that have been a hallmark of Catholic education.

8. How will the Common Core standards impact performance on standardized tests? Will our students be using the same tests given by the public schools?

As the students work through the updated curriculum, they will have the preparation necessary to take all requisite standardized tests. The standardized testing process, schedule and timeline will remain the same. The Archdiocese of Baltimore’s schools are not required to participate in state mandated testing or student information data sharing. Catholic schools will continue to remain true to the mission of academic excellence for each student in every Catholic school.

9. If I have more questions where do I go?

Contact your principal. If your principal does not have all the answers to your question he/she will contact the Department of Catholic Schools and someone from the Superintendent’s office will contact you directly.

Original FAQ

1. What curriculum changes are there for the 2013/2014 school year?

The Archdiocese, like other school systems, regularly reviews and updates curricula for various disciplines taught in their schools. This review includes an assessment of the latest subject-specific national and state guidelines and standards to inform the development of standards for Catholic schools. These standards serve as a guide to ensure all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have consistent learning objectives. With the standards serving as a framework, the Archdiocese of Baltimore creates its own curriculum, selects textbooks promoting a Catholic worldview, and chooses its own assessments. For example, in 2011/2012, the Archdiocese introduced a new religion curriculum for elementary schools, “Bringing Good News”. The standards, based on the Six Tasks of Catechesis from the *General Directory of Catechesis*, informed the development of this curriculum. In 2013/2014, the Archdiocese will launch a new math curriculum which will be phased-in over the next three years, starting with the introduction of teacher instructional strategies.

2. Why was the new math curriculum developed?

Based on updated national and state educational standards and a review of student performance data across the Archdiocese, the Department of Schools, in collaboration with Catholic educators, developed the new math curriculum. One indicator of student

performance is standardized testing. Another indicator is how the student applies the learned information. Based on student data on these indicators, the new math curriculum has been designed to improve each student's ability to learn, refine and apply skills to more effectively think, reason, and solve problems outside the classroom and testing environment.

3. How was the new math curriculum developed?

The Archdiocese's Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Professional Development, in conjunction with a working group of local Catholic educators, developed the new math curriculum after analyzing student performance data and the latest national learning standards, including the Common Core State Standards. The curriculum is based on eight standards for math practice integrated across all grade levels. Just like the religion curriculum referenced in question #1, the new math curriculum will include the standards, a course description, learning objectives, instructional strategies, a summary of the changes, and integration of Catholic identity elements.

4. How is the new math curriculum more robust than the prior curriculum?

Using student performance data, the new curriculum realigns math concepts with the appropriate grade level where they should be mastered. The concepts may be taught again with additional emphasis in the next grade level to master both information recall and application. This approach is designed to allow the skills taught to be naturally reinforced and students will continually reinforce basic concepts and learning skills within a new and higher level concept/procedure.

5. What changes can parents and students expect to see in pre-kindergarten through high school?

The new math curriculum is developed for application in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. While the Department of Catholic Schools does not develop curriculum for the high schools, they do collaborate with high school leadership to ensure the continuity of curriculum and a smooth transition for eighth grade students.

The differences in the new math curriculum will not be noticeable to most during this academic year and, like many changes, will take more than one school year to fully implement. The main emphasis in 2013/2014 will include instructional shifts for teachers to include a shared curriculum mapping allowing greater collaboration among teachers across the Archdiocese including resources and feedback.

In the upcoming year, as the new math curriculum phases into content shifts, additional updates will be provided to parents including the entire new curriculum guide.

Currently, the standardized testing process will remain the same as in years past with no planned changes to content or timing.

6. How are the teachers being supported with this change?

Teachers are being supported through professional development, team teaching groups within the school, and shared curriculum mapping allowing greater collaboration, resources, and discussion throughout the Archdiocese. A hallmark of Catholic education is nurturing students to their full-potential through a Christ-centered, academically-excellent education. The new math curriculum and future curriculum updates are designed to ensure a learning environment and school experience that offers the best in instruction, innovation, and creativity.

7. What is the timeframe associated with the full implementation of the new math curriculum?

Typically, full implementation of a new curriculum takes approximately three years with staff development, instructional changes, content shifts, and assessment. As the Archdiocese phases in upcoming stages of the new curriculum, parents will continue to be updated on these milestones.

8. Which textbooks will Catholic schools use for the new curriculum?

The Archdiocesan schools will continue to select textbooks that best meet the needs of their students and reflect the Catholic identity of its schools based on recommendations from the Department of Catholic Schools.

9. What is the schedule for curriculum changes in other disciplines for Catholic schools in the Archdiocese?

In 2014/2015, the Archdiocese will release a new curriculum for English Language Arts. Social Studies and Science are scheduled for curriculum changes in the subsequent years. Following the established curriculum review process, the Archdiocese will convene a working group of local Catholic educators to assess subject-specific national guidelines, national and state standards to inform the development of standards for Catholic schools.

10. How will the Archdiocese continue to keep parents informed of new initiatives in Catholic schools?

The Archdiocese and its schools will utilize their websites with updates and communicate with parents through video updates, e-blasts, Facebook, You Tube, and Twitter. If you have any questions that were not addressed through this FAQ, please contact your school directly.