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Feast of St. Luke, Evangelist

Re: Common Core State Standards and Diocese of Lansing Catholic Schools

Dear Parents, Guardians, and other Stakeholders in Catholic Schools:

In the midst of the perennial press for change in education, I am grateful for the unshakeable foundation upon which our Church and Catholic schools can stand strong amidst cultural and academic currents. Our mission and vision are clear: to partner with families to help children become intentional Disciples of Christ who love the Lord with their whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and their neighbors as themselves. To accomplish that lofty purpose, the faculty and staff in Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Lansing are committed to teaching every subject matter from the perspective of the faith, which is to say, from the perspective of Christ the Teacher. Our duty, simply put, is to meet the academic and formational standards of Christ.

As you are perhaps already aware, across our nation, educators at all levels in public, private, and Catholic schools have been grappling with the implications of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Because of our status as non-public schools, we have the freedom to take our time to reflect on the CCSS, and to prudently discern elements that may help us fulfill our mission more effectively and which aspects (including content expectations) conflict with our faith and mission. I am grateful for this freedom, and we will proceed prudently.

Some (arch)dioceses have adopted the CCSS as the basis for their curriculum. The National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), for its part, has been working on a faith-based adaptation of the CCSS, called the Catholic Common Core Identity Initiative (CCCII). It seems wise to me for us to proceed slowly, in order to discern the potential benefits and liabilities of the CCSS as well as NCEA's CCCII. To help in the discernment process, I will be taking part in a conference in early November with other concerned Catholic educators to discuss the potential benefits and limitations of the CCSS and the CCCII. I will have more to share after that valuable meeting.

For now, let me state clearly that the Diocese of Lansing has not and will not





"adopt" the Common Core State Standards as our diocesan standards. As we have with all earlier standards, we will make a thorough review of the CCSS, the CCCII, and our current curriculum, and then develop curricular standards and content expectations that will help us better fulfill our mission. We will exclude any elements of the Common Core that are unhelpful, harmful, or contradict the faith.

Whatever the challenges or hurdles, we will never flag in our commitment to teach the Beautiful, the Good, and the True. Neither the Common Core nor any future standards will cause us to compromise our moral, faith, and academic commitments or "dumb-down" our expectations. On the contrary, Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Lansing will monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve our curriculum at the elementary and high school levels to ensure that it is rigorous, relevant (in the timeless sense of relevance), and committed to teaching children the truth about themselves, the world, and God's self-revelation of love.

Because of the inevitable influence of the CCSS on textbooks, I want to assure you that the Office of the Superintendent, administrators, and teachers will be reviewing texts to ensure that they are well-suited to help teachers fulfill diocesan curricular expectations. To that end, we will be making curriculum review a high priority at the diocesan level, in collaboration, of course, with teachers and administrators in our schools.

One other point may be helpful to clarify. As you know, this year the Diocese of Lansing transitioned from using the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to a version of the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) "Measures of Academic Progress" for Grades 2-8. We made the change because this test closely matches our current curriculum and gives us immediate results. It also allows for multiple assessments each year, which will help us track student progress over time. The version of the NWEA test we are using is not based on the Common Core State Standards. Results of these assessments are used primarily at the local level to improve teaching and learning in our classrooms.

Finally, I want to assure you that no government curriculum standards will define or limit teaching in our classrooms. We remain committed to teaching subject matter from the aspect of the faith. This is an ongoing work, and I humbly ask that you keep me, Associate Superintendent Sean Costello, our principals, administrators, and teachers in your prayers, as we seek ever more to please our Heavenly Father in the formation of children. Thank you.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

Rev. James M. Mattoon