

ISSUE BULLETIN



THE CARDINAL
NEWMAN SOCIETY
Promoting and Defending
Faithful Catholic Education

CatholicsOurCore.org

Examining Critical Issues in Faithful Catholic Education

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Statement of The Cardinal Newman Society on ‘Catholic Is Our Core’

This publication is part of a series of reports on the Common Core State Standards Initiative and how those standards potentially impact Catholic education.

December 20, 2013 – In recent decades, Church leaders, together with Catholic families, have come to better appreciate that Catholic identity is essential to Catholic schools’ mission, teaching methods, curriculum, and appeal. It is because of their Catholic identity that schools are most attentive to the needs of students and their families. “These Catholic schools afford the fullest and best opportunity to realize the fourfold purpose of Christian education, namely to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, 2005).

Although Catholic schools in the United States—which have served students and the Church in an exemplary way for more than a century—have avoided many of the pedagogical and curricular trends in public schools, some Catholic educators have recently advocated for Catholic schools to adopt or adapt the untested and increasingly controversial Common Core State Standards Initiative.

We have grave concerns. This school reform effort is nothing short of a revolution in how education is provided, relying on a technocratic, top-down approach to setting national standards that, despite claims to the contrary, will drive curricula, teaching texts, and the content of standardized tests. At its heart, the Common Core is a woefully inadequate set of standards in that it limits the understanding of education to a utilitarian “readiness for work” mentality.

Well-intentioned proponents of adopting the Common Core in Catholic schools have argued that Catholic identity can be “infused” into the Core. This approach misses the point that authentic Catholic identity is not something that can be added to education built around thoroughly secular standards, but that our faith must be the center of—and fundamental to—everything that a Catholic school does.

The Common Core revolution in American education was launched behind closed doors and rushed to implementation in public schools with the promise of tax dollars as an inducement—even though all the Standards have not yet been completed, and those that have been released are controversial among many expert educators and parents. Catholic educators need not rush to follow this potentially dangerous path.

There is an ongoing, healthy debate about whether the Common Core is appropriate in public schools, and even more so in Catholic schools. Let it run its course. The Cardinal Newman Society—together with the countless Catholic parents, principals and pastors we have heard from—is concerned that we will be locked into the Common Core before it has been thoroughly and rigorously evaluated.

Most troubling in the public debate about whether Catholic schools should adopt the Common Core is that parents, whom the Church recognizes are the primary educators of their children, have been largely absent from it. They lack sufficient information to make judgments about the Common Core. And yet, as the Church has clearly taught, parents deserve a strong voice in deciding whether to embrace this “fundamental shift” in Catholic education, as the Common Core has been described by one leading Catholic advocate.

The Cardinal Newman Society is concerned that adoption of the Common Core at this time is premature. Worse, it may be a mistake that will be difficult or impossible to undo for years to come. We do not doubt the good intentions of those who advocate the Common Core in Catholic schools, and we acknowledge their confidence that Catholic schools can maintain a strong Catholic identity even while measuring their quality according to secular standards. But we do not share this confidence, in light of the sad experience in recent decades of many Catholic colleges, hospitals, and charities that believed they could infuse Catholic identity into the secular standards that they embraced.

We seek to help inform the dialogue about the Common Core with our new project and website, Catholic Is Our Core (www.CatholicIsOurCore.org), while expanding the conversation to include parents, educators and principals who have largely been absent from the debate. The Cardinal Newman Society’s mission is to promote and defend faithful Catholic education. We are working closely with key Catholic education experts and others to provide analysis of the Core and its potential impact on Catholic schools. We seek to provide those concerned about faithful Catholic education with solid information, analysis and arguments to more fully understand the potential impact of the Common Core on Catholic education and to advise caution about the Common Core until it can be further studied and evaluated.