

Why Catholic schools are reconsidering Common Core

by [Cathaleen Chen](#)

December 8, 2015

(The Christian Science Monitor) As more and more states are opting out of Common Core's standardized testing, Roman Catholic schools around the country are reconsidering the rigorous learning goals as well—but for spiritual reasons.

According to surveys by the National Catholic Educational Association, about half of the 195 U.S. dioceses initially adopted the federally recommended Common Core standards. Emphasizing standardized testing and critical thinking development, Common Core is geared towards college preparation.

Although it's not yet clear how many dioceses that have stopped using the standards or abstained from Common Core testing, national Catholic organizations are prompting educators to review their curriculum and purpose, posing the question, how could Catholic schools integrate religious tenets with the Common Core standards?

The National Catholic Educational Association recommends a set of lesson plans tailored to Catholic teachings, which includes a fifth-grade English lesson on the Civil War that incorporates the idea of righteousness and a fourth-grade geometry lesson that uses the Christian cross to teach parallel, perpendicular, and intersecting lines.

"Many parents are listening to the news. They see the political charge," Sister John Mary Fleming, executive director for education at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, told the Associated Press. "What this situation has done is created an opportunity for Catholic schools to review our mission: What is our mission and how does the curriculum support that mission?"

On one hand, college preparation isn't part of the moral and spiritual conditioning at the heart of Catholic education. On the other, rejecting the standards could put students who matriculate to public high schools could be at a disadvantage.

"Right now, Catholic schools are still trying to figure out how they respond to the Common Core and how deeply they embrace it," Dan Guernsey, director of K-12 programming at the Cardinal Newman Society, told AP.

So far, individual dioceses—private schools not obligated to use the standards even if the state opts in—have gone with an assortment of approaches.

The Diocese of Albany, for instance, announced recently that it will limit participation in the Common Core-aligned tests but keep the learning standards. Instead of testing their students every year between the third and eighth grade, Albany Catholic schools will have testing every odd-numbered grade and with a different metric of achievement.

In Denver, Colorado, and Lansing, Michigan, Common Core is avoided altogether.

There are nearly 2 million students in the U.S. who are enrolled in 6,568 Catholic schools, according to the National Catholic Education Association. Most of them are elementary schools.

"We don't open Catholic schools to get kids into college," Guernsey said. "We open Catholic schools to get them into heaven."

This report contains material from the Associated Press.