

NPCS and Common Core Standards

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What are they?

They are a set of curriculum goals, now adopted by more than 40 U.S. states for K-12 public schools, soon to be used in state tests to measure how well students have accomplished these goals. One *national* testing group, the ACT, is already making proto-type tests that match the Common Core. In states which have adopted the Common Core, these standards replace what are commonly called “state standards.” The State of Michigan Education Department has adopted the Common Core.

Where is NPCS on these standards?

The school has not officially adopted them but the administration is providing professional training to help teachers to accomplish these goals with our students, especially the standards to teach students to write clearly and to read “difficult texts” in all subject areas at every level.

What are the issues surrounding the standards?

Some people nationally have raised issues that it is “another sign of the government intruding into parents’ responsibilities” and even a few raising the idea of government “brain-washing.” NPCS is not under this regulation because it is not a government school.

In a related issue, some parents do not want any government agency even suggesting curriculum content. Common Core standards are *skill* standards and not *content* or *idea* standards, .e.g., a skill standard is “being able to write persuasively”; a secular content standard might be “to know Darwin’s theory of evolution.” Common Core leaves content to the school, including public schools.

What has NPCS done so far with Common Core?

The administration over the past year has sent teachers and administrators to regional training sessions for both to understand Common Core. In the 2012-2013 school year, the school hired a teacher coach to both convince teachers and show them how to teach students to write well at even the kindergarten level and in disciplines such as art, technology, and math. This coach has also given teachers a variety of examples that constitute “difficult texts” at each level with ideas for testing students on comprehension of these.

Why are we doing this?

We want to prepare our students in the best ways we can find to (a) thrive at this and the next level of learning (b) become skillful in ‘riting, reading, and ‘rithmetic, the 3Rs , and (c) infuse all of their learning with a fourth R, religion, specifically faith in our living Lord, Jesus Christ, so that all may meet our mission: “to impact their world for Jesus Christ.

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What are some examples of weaving faith into skills of the Common Core?

One Common Core standard in writing is to take a position and defend it, also being able to compare and contrast that position with something else. This 11th grade literature question does that exactly: “Identify three characteristics of the Hemingway hero: Is this approach to life consistent with Biblical Christianity? Using verses / principles of scripture, explain why or why not.”

1. A Common Core standard in social studies is to help students comprehend the meaning in a “difficult text.” In this example from 8th grade social studies, the teacher presented the students with a quotation from President Washington’s First Inaugural, a difficult text, and had students find those phrases which would help a reader know what Washington believed. After discussion in class, the students were tested on what they had learned. Here’s the “difficult text” quote:

“It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes, and may enable every instrument employed in its administration to execute with success the functions allotted to his charge. In tendering this homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, I assure myself that it expresses your sentiments not less than my own, nor those of my fellow--citizens at large less than either. No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the Invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of men more than those of the United States. Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency.”

2. A Common Core standard is that students at all levels must learn to do opinion writing, expressive writing, and informational writing. To accomplish expressive writing at the 2nd grade level, a teacher gave students the writing frame of “I used to be a _____. But now I am a _____. Here’s an example of the result, “I used to be a green candy heart, but now I am a big turtle’s tail.”