

**We are not so Common.**

***A comparison of curricula:***

***Common Core State Standards vs. Classical Christian at North Hills Christian School***

“God reveals a lot through General Revelation and we need to be sorting, checking, and discerning what the World is offering and take it and put it in a biblical system of Education.”

*Written by North Hills Christian School’s Dean of Academics, Leslie Pullen, M.Ed.*

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are based on a book entitled Understanding by Design by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins. The philosophy behind this current movement is “backwards planning,” which from a curricular standpoint, is an excellent method of ensuring final outcomes. In this method, a school (or district) first decides what graduates of that institution should know in a particular subject, and then each grade level works towards adding a piece to that final puzzle. Here at North Hills, that is exactly how we reworked our history curriculum. High school and middle school history teachers first discussed what a NHCS graduate should know in history, (objectives) and then they pulled in elementary teachers to help lay down the plans to achieve those objectives, which in turn led to us to choose the following curricula: “Story of the World”, “Mystery of History” and Western Civilizations I and II.

Also embedded in the CCSS is less emphasis on standardized tests and more emphasis on authentic and alternative assessment. At North Hills, we wholeheartedly embrace this philosophy and train our teachers to assess students in many ways, including the formal standardized tests. Teachers who have taught under the CCSS enjoy more freedom in how their students are assessed, and no longer have to “teach” to the test. Our teachers at NHCS never had to “teach to the test” and are encouraged to use both formative and summative methods of assessment.

The Association of Christian Schools Incorporated (ACSI), the Christian organization through which we are accredited, recommends that Christian schools examine the CCSS, pulling from them what are good teaching practices and using them as a floor, not a ceiling. In other words, we need to critically read and discuss them, and build upon them. Maintain the good elements such as Socratic questioning, critical thinking and collaborative activities.

Then, enrich the curriculum with historical connections, primary documents and enthusiastic, creative teachers! A final quote from a recent ACSI webinar on CCSS- “God reveals a lot through General Revelation and we need to be sorting, checking, discerning what the World is offering and take it and put it in a biblical system of Education.”