

St. Leo School Curriculum Meeting

Links and FAQ Page

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This specific is aimed at giving you a broad overview of a classical curriculum. Below are some basic bullets. St. Leo's is already a great school, fully committed to the idea that our children deserve high level academic excellence AND robust faith formation. The best Catholic schools understand that these goals do not compete, but rather reinforce one another. You probably have some questions about how it all works and why we are so confident. Here are some answers. They are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather give you a sense of familiarity.

What is a classical curriculum?

There are several attributes that set a classical curriculum apart from what you might see in a standard modern classroom. Highlights include:

- [Teaching according to the students' developmental stage](#): Children change as they grow. In their younger years they are capable of processing and internalizing an astonishing amount of material. The classical approach responds by stressing basic skills and knowledge in the early years. There is an emphasis on math facts, basic grammar, acquisition of poetry and scripture. Later, the approach changes as the children change. [Here is a link showing how the concept was brought back to life by Dorothy Sayers a few decades back, along with a general explanation of the classical concept.](#)
- Language acquisition: Closely related to the first point, children are most open to language instruction in their early years. The classical approach responds by introducing [Latin](#) at an early age. (Note that the link takes you to an article by a CEO at a technology company.) Academically, [Latin is a proven path to higher standardized test scores, it prepares students for the acquisition of various modern languages in later years, and just as important offers a profound and lasting introduction to the language of the church.](#) More [at this link](#).
- Cross-curricular learning: The classical approach coordinates lesson plans across the curriculum, which is a fancy way of saying it teaches classes, particularly the liberal arts (English, history, theology) according to a timeline. For instance, you cannot fully understand European history without understanding European art and literature, so special care is taken to teach these subjects at the same time. This lends itself to highly effective project-based learning—and in Catholic schools, faith formation is often the project. Culture impacts religion and religion impacts culture in important ways. This is the most effective way ensure that faith formation happens not just in theology class, but in ALL classes, every day.
- Great books: As parents and as educators, [we must introduce our children to the best that the world has ever produced.](#) This requires a strong emphasis on books and materials that will train students to [think, speak and write clearly](#). Just like we strive to feed their bodies with healthy food, we should strive to feed their minds with great books. This of course needs to

be age appropriate, interesting, and joyful. But it can be. There is great work available for all age levels. We know where it is and what it is. We should use it.

- Repetition and reinforcement: A classical education is custom-built for a K-8 schools. In the early years (1-4), children go through a structured progression, from ancient to modern. In 5-8 they revisit these concepts in more depth, building on their newly acquired analytical and communication skills. The high school walks them through again 9-12 at a very high level.
- [Here is a very good, one-link overview.](#)

Is this rigorous enough? Is it too rigorous?

- Parents often ask whether a particular educational approach will prepare their children for the world of work and higher education. Some of the highest performing schools in America adhere to the classical approach. For instance, in Pittsburgh, [the Aquinas Academy](#) is unmatched in standardized test performance, college attendance and scholarship acquisition.
- Other parents might wonder if their children are academically prepared for such a curriculum. Fortunately, a classical curriculum is not designed only for the “academic elite.” For most of history, almost all Catholic schools adhered to the classical approach. More recently, [one of the most famous classical academies in America](#) is an [open enrollment diocesan school in a struggling section of Washington](#), DC, that [transitioned to classical](#) in just the last few years.
 - One of the top high schools in the country by several measures is [a public classical academy](#), which is open enrollment.
 - [A small Catholic school in Denver nearly doubled its enrollment](#) after switching to a classical curriculum.
 - [A rural version.](#)
 - [Here is a parish school that flipped to classical over the summer just a few years back, and has seen great success.](#)
 - In the UK, [the study of Latin is seen as a way to help low-performing students.](#)
 - Immaculata Classical Academy offers a very high end academic experience to high performing students... [but strives to reserve 15-20 percent of spots in each class for students with special needs, with a focus on students with Down Syndrome.](#)

What about learning in the STEM fields? Will my child be prepared for a career in math and science?

- Yes. Classical education is committed to forming the whole child. Math and science are a crucial part of that endeavor. [Here are a few classical academies showing how their students out-perform public schools in math and science.](#)
- Only two schools in Colorado made the list of top 100 STEM schools in the county. [Both are classical/liberal arts academies.](#)
- [Aquinas Academy of Pittsburgh](#) is a thriving K-12 classical academy. Dr. Gregory Reed, Elk County native and ECC alum, is on the board of directors there. His day job is serving as a professor of engineering at the University of Pittsburgh. He proudly notes that many Aquinas grads go on to challenging STEM majors at Pitt, Penn State, Carnegie Mellon, the Ivy

League and a host of other world renowned universities. [By the way, Aquinas was recently named the best Catholic high school in Pennsylvania.](#)

Will my child be prepared for high school?

- Elk County Catholic High School is in the process of transforming its core humanities curriculum to the classical approach, and the timing will be synced to the St. Leo's curriculum.

If you would like to see a full-blown curriculum, [you can find one here](#). You can see the National Catholic Register report on the resurgence of the classical approach [here](#). For more resources, go [here](#) and [here](#) for just two of the organizations dedicated to the growth of classical education in Catholic schools. There are many, many resources available.

Finally, I mentioned that St. Jerome's in Hyattsville is one of the schools leading the charge in classical education. [Here is their education plan, in its entirety](#), if you are interested in a deep exploration. Please not that this is one version of a plan. Other schools have copied it in its entirety and launched it. Others have tried other paths, such as the curriculum designed by [Memoria Press](#) and the [Kolbe Academy](#), which is available as a home schooling curriculum, as an online curriculum, and as a [curriculum in bricks and mortar schools](#). The revision of the core humanities at Elk County Catholic High School has been based on Kolbe. Mrs. Messineo has used it to guide her highly successful AP Lit and Lang courses for several years now.

OK. Maybe that is way too much for you. Perhaps it is not nearly enough. Either way, it's a start. Please let us know if you have any questions.