

Frequently Asked Questions

THE FUTURE OF OUR SCHOOL

Our St. Mary's Catholic Church has entered the process of renewing our overall vision as a parish to provide the most authentic Catholic education we can.

To accomplish this, the school—an important ministry at our parish—is changing its curriculum to Montessori for our youngest saints & scholars (preschool-3rd grade) and a Classical Liberal Arts education for upper elementary and middle school (4th - 8th grade).

Let us pray for the entire parish during this time of transition, that we may move forward, unified in Christ:



My Adorable Jesus,
 May our feet journey together.
 May our hands gather in unity.
 May our hearts beat in unison.
 May our souls be in harmony.
 May our thoughts be as one.
 May our ears listen to the silence together.
 May our glances profoundly penetrate each other.
 May our lips pray together to gain mercy from the Eternal Father.
 Amen.

FAQ TOPICS IN THIS DOCUMENT:

- Curriculum
- Teachers
- Cost
- School Culture



Curriculum

"For too long, we have taken our cues and curriculum from the troubled secular model without realizing their corrosive effect."
- Institute for Catholic Liberal Education

1

What is Classical Education? Will it prepare our children for high school?

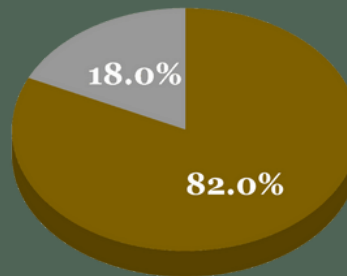
A Classical Liberal Arts education is cross disciplinary and holistic. Classical education focuses on grounding the student in history and then exploring literature, mathematics, science, art, and music from the lens of this historical perspective. As all expressions of the human experience stem from our identity as children of God and are grounded in time and space, it is important for students to be able to make connections across all disciplines in an ordered way. The Liberal Arts refer to the school subjects which *liberate*, or free, a person to explore truth, encounter The Truth in Christ within *all* disciplines, cultivate critical thinking, experience culture, and live fully.

Studies have shown that classically educated students are more prepared for high school and college than the standard education models due to the rigorous standards that they are held to by their teachers, assignments and testing.¹

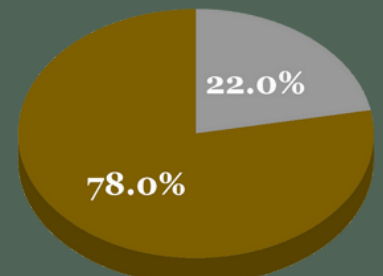
In order to make the transition to Classical a successful one for our teachers and students, we will be partnering with the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education (ICLE), the same institute that has been helping St. Francis de Sales in Newark. They have proposed a **three-year renewal plan** and will be helping with the training of our teachers.

Below are some statistics from a recent study conducted by ICLE about schools that implement a Classical curriculum:

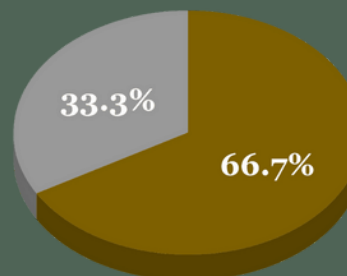
82% of school leaders report better faculty engagement



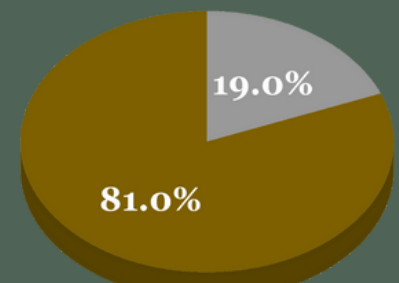
78% of Catholic liberal arts schools increased enrollment since 2018



2/3 schools report increased family engagement in the life of faith



81% of schools report test scores increased or remained the same





INSTITUTE FOR CATHOLIC LIBERAL EDUCATION



The Spreading Renewal of Catholic Education
A Guide for Parents

Q. What is Catholic liberal education?

A. The term “Catholic liberal education” is simply a description of the full vision of human formation according to the mind of the Church. It is desirable and accessible to everyone who has a soul. This approach is catholic with both a large and small “c,” meaning that it is universal. It is liberal, in the classical sense of the term drawn from the Latin *liber*, which means *free*. Authentic Catholic education frees us to see the truth of things as well as to order our lives and our loves to that truth. With a 2,500-year proven track record, this gold standard of education produced many of the keenest minds and the holiest saints in history. It works.

Q. How does Catholic liberal education relate to Catholic classical education?

A. Different term, same idea. For millennia, education was seen not as mere job training but as a search for wisdom and virtue. The Catholic Church took up this classical tradition in the liberal arts and sciences and ordered it toward Jesus Christ. “Classical” education is a kind of shorthand that speaks to the origins of the tradition; “Catholic liberal education” speaks to its end—freedom in Christ. Different schools choose different labels, but they are all reclaiming the same path to human flourishing. These schools are at the forefront of an exciting renewal of Catholic education across the country. What began in small pockets is now spreading to entire dioceses.

Secular Education

Ordered toward material, temporal ends

- fragmented, industrialized
- focus on practical skills
- emphasis on information
- ignores the moral imagination
- one mile wide, one inch deep
- lectures + testing = passive learning
- susceptible to indoctrination

Q. Why is this change desirable for children?

A. Modern educational approaches have degenerated into a factory model driven by standardized testing. Cram, test, forget. By emphasizing fragmented facts and skills over rich content, they fail even by their own metrics to form students who can think well, speak well, and write well. Education becomes a dull chore rather than an adventure of discovery. By contrast, Catholic liberal education engages children in a lifelong love of learning by teaching them to investigate the meaning and purpose of all created things. With the ancients, we recognize that wisdom begins in wonder. Children become motivated to hone the skills needed to pursue knowledge, and to see all things through the eyes of faith. They gain confidence and hope.

Q. What changes can we expect to see in our school, and for what purpose?

A. Parents can expect to see their children find new joy in learning, because learning to think is actually fun. Only an engaged learner can truly grasp and incorporate new knowledge to see patterns and connections that will propel her to delve deeper. Teachers help children to see all subjects as part of the human story, from language to mathematics, history to science. The focus is not simply on conveying information, but also on cultivating each child’s intellectual faculties, including the ability to observe, to listen, to remember, to make connections, to speculate, to calculate, to persuade, and to love that which is worthy of loving. By reading stories aloud and discussing them, teachers are developing those abilities, and they are also forming the children’s imagination. By examining and drawing objects in nature, children are developing their powers of attention. You can expect lots of history, fewer worksheets, more creative assignments, more writing, recitation of poetry, and memorization of key building blocks of learning, such as math facts and parts of speech. Less homework does not mean less learning!

Q. How long will this transition take?

A. Most schools plan for a two-year transition of their curriculum, while St. Mary School is planning to take three-years. In year one, we will be focusing on professional development for our teachers--partnering with ICLE. In year two, ICLE recommends bringing in history to replace social studies, choosing high quality literature to complement the history sequence, and implementing a strong writing program. In year three the focus is on bringing the same kind of wonder and deep thinking into the math and science curricula, fully integrating them with all other learning.

Q. What about STEM education? Won't my child be left behind?

A. Absolutely not! This education prepared brilliant scientists and mathematicians throughout history because it gave them mastery of “the language of number” and trained them to see patterns and connections in their studies and experiments. Trained in logical thinking, they were pioneers of scientific discovery.

Q. Is this too rigorous for every kind of learner? What about children with special needs?

A. Every child can benefit from this deeply human formation that proceeds along an age-appropriate path. Often, we see that children who struggle to learn become more engaged and motivated by the clear stepping stones, the rich content, and the spirit of inquiry in these classrooms. Also, there is built-in differentiation that allows all kinds of learners to find success.

Catholic Liberal Education

Ordered toward eternal happiness

- integration of subjects, knowledge, faith
- restores meaning & purpose
- awakens wonder
- nurtures the moral imagination
- cultivates habits of rigorous thinking
- constant discussion = active learning
- develops intellectual freedom

Q. Will my child be college and career ready?

A. Superbly. There is no better formation for the human mind, heart, and soul. When we aim at human flourishing in faith, wisdom, and virtue, we certainly attain—and far exceed—the aims of “college and career readiness.” These students are prepared to be the moral leaders of the future.

Q. How can I support these expanded learning opportunities at home?

A. Read with your children and ask questions about the stories, including the ones they are reading at school. Wonder aloud about the things you see in nature. Delight in their ability to learn wonderful poems by heart, and see if you can do it as well as they can. (You can't!) Don't ask, “What did you get on that test?” Instead, ask, “What was the most interesting thing you learned today? Tell me about it!”

Q. What are the expected outcomes of the transition to this approach to education?

A. Students develop precise tools of thinking that are the foundation of a nimble mind. They have a greater mastery of language and mathematics because they have learned in an ordered, comprehensive way. Children come to love what is good and true and beautiful. This formation protects them from the anxiety and skepticism of the culture. Most importantly, Catholic liberal education unites faith and learning. Children can see God's creation in all its beauty, complexity, and mystery. They can see themselves in the story of salvation history. In this way, children are drawn more deeply into a trusting relationship with Him. Only this will make them truly happy in this world and the next.

The Top Ten Differences Found in a Catholic Classical Liberal Arts School

1. **Children are excited, happy, and hungry to learn.** Their parents report that they enthusiastically share their new knowledge and discoveries at home and that they have longer attention spans.
2. **The content is richer and deeper** than one would expect for any given age group.
3. Because instruction is ordered toward the nature and development of the child, **it is natural and enjoyable.**
4. **Children develop keen skills of long-term memory** because all learning is integrated into other things they know, so it sticks. Knowledge is no longer stored in short-term memory, to be forgotten after the test.
5. **Children become attuned to pattern, order, and relationships between things;** this ability is a fundamental building block of thinking in every discipline and in every career.
6. **Children grow in understanding by looking deeply into things,** rather than by skimming the surface. They master the art of thinking, which equips them for life.
7. **Children are intentionally nurtured on examples of intellectual and moral virtue across the curriculum.** Because all humans learn first and foremost by imitation, the students strive to form these habits and internalize them.
8. **Children are inspired by immersion in things that are good and true and beautiful.** They see not just what is, but also what ought to be. They are protected from the skepticism of the modern world.
9. **Children are engaged by the dramatic, chronological story of history as salvation history;** they better understand today's world and they learn to see themselves and their earthly vocation in light of this reality.
10. This is the formation that **truly equips children with the confidence and joy** that comes from seeing the meaning and purpose of things through the eyes of faith. It is education for *discipleship*.



2

What is Montessori Education?

Montessori education is student-led and self-paced but guided, assessed, and enriched by knowledgeable and caring teachers, the leadership of their child peers, and a nurturing environment.

A distinctive feature of Montessori education is the specific materials and activities² that allow a child to learn through action.³ These materials were developed by Dr. Montessori and her collaborators over 45 years, and are integral to the program that also involves placing children in 3-year groupings, lessons that are almost exclusively in small groups or one-on-one,⁴ a highly organized physical space, and free choice among constructive learning activities. The materials used in these activities provide corrective feedback, and are grouped into curricular areas of Sensorial, Language, Mathematics and Geometry, Geography, Culture, Music, and Art, as well as Practical Life.⁵⁻⁷

These curricular areas help to foster growth for children in all areas of their development—cognitive, emotional, social, and physical.

3

What are the benefits of a Montessori Education?

Given the freedom and support to question, probe deeply, and make connections, Montessori students grow up to be confident, enthusiastic, and self-directed learners and citizens, accountable to both themselves and their community. They think critically, work collaboratively, and act boldly and with integrity.

According to studies:

Children who previously attended Montessori programs showed social and cognitive benefits by high school.⁸

Children who attended public Montessori programs from ages 3 to 11 performed better at ages 15 to 18 in math and science than demographically-matched classmates who had been in other programs through the 5th grade.⁹

People who spent at least two years in Montessori had higher wellbeing as adults than people who never went to Montessori.¹⁰

Children in Classic Montessori programs, as compared with children in Supplemented Montessori and Conventional programs, showed significantly greater school year gains on outcome measures of executive function, reading, math, vocabulary, and social problem-solving.¹¹



4

How will students with an IEP be supported in the new model?

Dr. Montessori first developed the Montessori method by working with children with special needs. Through observation and testing, these children met or exceeded comprehension and curriculum expectations compared to other children. Each child in a Montessori classroom gets a tailored lesson plan to ensure that they are successful and excelling. **IEP support will continue to be available for all children.**

5

Will there be afterschool care?

Yes, an afterschool program will be offered. We understand that this is valuable and meets the care that parents need for their children. We will be offering after school care for the same ages we offer now. This care will be from 3:00-6:00 p.m.

UPDATE**7**

When will the Vision Meetings be rescheduled for parents?

Classical Catholic Education - May 9 at 7pm, School Commons

Watch Online:

<https://youtu.be/h6Mj7j4-NkY>



Montessori Catholic Education - May 23 at 6:30pm, School Commons

8

Will specials still be offered (ie: gym, art, language & music)

Yes! The specials that are currently offered at St. Mary's will still be included in our curriculum. These are all integral parts of a holistic education for a well-rounded saint and scholar.

9

How will these changes affect my child next year?

In the fall, my child will be entering...

Next year, we will begin by implementing a Children's House for the preschool and pre-kindergarten children. Our preschool director has been invited to train and implement this change alongside a trained mentor during this first year.

Our Kindergarten through 8th Grade teachers will begin training and professional development. Most students will not see any change in curriculum or classroom in 2023-2024.

	8th Grade	7th Grade	6th Grade	5th Grade	4th Grade	3rd Grade	2nd Grade	1st Grade	Kinder-garten	Pre-K	Preschool
'23-'24	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	CH	CH

CURRICULUM KEY

T - Standard Classroom

CH - Children's House (Montessori)

In the 2023-2024 academic year, their education curriculum will be...

A Reminder

Our Vision to become a Montessori and Classical School will take several years to implement across all levels, transitioning incrementally to best aid teachers and students.

Implementation Schedule

In the fall, my child will be entering...

How will these changes affect my child, specifically?

	8th Grade	7th Grade	6th Grade	5th Grade	4th Grade	3rd Grade	2nd Grade	1st Grade	Kinder garden 6 y.o.	Kinder garden 5 y.o.*	4 y.o.	3 y.o.
'23-'24	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	T	CH	CH
'24-'25		C	C	C	T	T	T	T	T	CH	CH	CH
'25-'26			C	C	C	LUE	LUE	T	LE	LE	CH	CH
'26-'27				C	C	C	LUE	LUE	LE	LE	LE	CH
'27-'28					C	C	C	UE	UE	LE	LE	LE
'28-'29						C	C	C	UE	UE	LE	LE
'29-'30							C	C	C	UE	UE	LE
'30-'31								C	C	C	UE	UE
'31-'32									C	C	C	UE
'32-'33										C	C	C
'33-'34											C	C
'34-'35												C

CURRICULUM KEY

T - Standard Classroom

CH - Children's House (Montessori)

LE - Lower Elementary (Montessori)

LUE - "Light" Upper Elementary
(Montessori is only a supplement in order to accommodate the students' transitional needs. Also blends with Classical)

UE - Upper Elementary (Montessori with transition to Classical)

C - Classical Liberal Arts Education

And over the years, their education curriculum will be...

This implementation schedule reflects our intentions for the transition based on current conversations with teachers.

**Parents of younger rising kindergarteners may choose for their child to stay back a year in 2024-2025 if the child is not ready for 1st grade. If this is the case, the child will enter the Children's House, instead.*

10

What options are available for the Children's House next year? (Ages 3-4)

- **5 Full Day Program (M-F) 8am to 3:00pm**
 - This includes:
 - Montessori work cycle and recess each day
 - Packed lunch
 - Atrium (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd - "CGS") once a week
 - The opportunity to either nap or rest in the afternoon followed by more activities and additional recess.
- **5 Half Day Program (M-F) 8am to 11:30am**
 - This includes:
 - Montessori 3 hour work cycle and recess each day
 - Atrium (CGS) once a week
- **3 Full Day Program (M-W) 8am to 3:00pm**
 - This includes:
 - Montessori work cycle and recess each day
 - Packed lunch
 - Atrium (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd - "CGS") once a week
 - The opportunity to either nap or rest in the afternoon followed by more activities and additional recess.
- **3 Half Day Program (M-W) 8am to 11:30am**
 - This includes:
 - Montessori 3 hour work cycle and recess each day
 - Atrium (CGS) once a week

UPDATE

11

Will there be before school care?

We would love to offer before school care! We will be sending out an interest form for enrolled parents to see if there is enough interest in offering this program.



Teachers

UPDATE

1

What does this mean for teachers?

Our teachers are an integral part of the vision at St. Mary. *Contract renewals have now been offered. We are still waiting on a few teachers and will release a list very soon.*

Teachers are given the opportunity to select from several training and certification programs that best fit their personal needs.

Other state and Diocesan teaching license requirements remain the same.

2

What are the training options for the teachers?

- North American Montessori Center
- Authentic Institute of Montessori
- ADMTEI
- Columbus Montessori Education Center
- AMI Prague
- ICLE Professional Development
- ICLE National Conference

"The most important change comes by investing in people, not curricula. Teachers need time, training, support, and encouragement to grow in this beautiful vision of education and to make it their own." - ICLE, our partnering institution

3

Is the hiring of a new guidance counselor in the works?

Mrs. Ford and Nurse Sally have been in communication with Veritas Counseling and a counselor, Krista Steele, has been found.



UPDATE

4

Who will be the principal for the 2023-2024 school year?

Mr. Brian Lower has stepped down from the position of principal for the 2023-2024 academic year. He will continue his duties as a teacher in the school, and we wish him well. The search for a principal for the 2023-24 year has begun. The details of this process will be made clear to all, with regular updates for our faculty, staff, and parents. The principal position has been publicly posted for interested, qualified applicants on the Diocesan website.

Our search committee has been finalized, and we have started interviews. Please congratulate our committee members, all of whom were chosen to offer insights across different ages and groups in the school:

Teachers: Paula Bevins, Heather Fletcher | **Parents:** Jillian Snavley, Kelley Holsten | **Parish Staff:** Emily Wu | **Diocese:** Superintendent Dr. Adam DuFault | **Other:** Ed Watson, Vice Principal of St. Francis de Sales

The committee members' role will be to participate at upcoming interviews and to offer their insights so that I can make the best decision for our school. I am so thankful for their willingness to help in this way.

Cost

UPDATE

1 What will happen to tuition given the new model?

Our intent has been to keep tuition costs the same. As in the past, tuition cost is reviewed annually based on **enrollment, cost-of-living, and operational & safety needs.**

Our Tuition Rates have now been released for K-8, the Children's House, and our After Care program. You can learn more in our Tuition Rates Document visit www.delawarestmary.org/vision or by scanning the QR code.



UPDATE

2 Is tuition assistance still available?

Yes. We have extended the deadline for tuition assistance through FACTS to continue to meet the needs of our families. This includes \$110k+ to be awarded through the Emmaus Road Scholarship for St. Mary School, which was raised by our parishioners specifically for tuition assistance.

In addition, we are offering scholarships for our preschool and pre-k students. An application will be available soon.



School Culture

1 What is the definition and role of the school advisory board?

The School Advisory Board is a volunteer-based board to help support the parish/school leadership on advice for specific agenda items.

2 What are the new school hours?

We have received official approval to extend our school day to **8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

This change allows us to offer a more holistic and Christo-centric education that respects the **entire person and values the promise of eternal life.**

This adjusted school schedule allows for...

- Deeper learning & flow
- Appropriate time for lunch
- Longer teacher planning periods
- More time for the sacramental life (like Mass) without sacrificing academics

3 What will the class ratios be in each grade?

The class ratios will depend on enrollment and is driven by the state guidelines that take into account space and the age of children.

4 Will our children wear uniforms?

Yes, our children will continue to wear uniforms.

5 When can we expect to see the 2023-2024 calendar?

The school calendar is now available! You can download a copy at www.delawarestmary.org/vision or by scanning the QR code.

Major Dates:

- August 17: First Day of School (K-8th)
- Sept 18-22: Fall Break
- Dec 21-Jan 2: Winter Break
- March 25-April 3: Spring Break
- May 31: Last Day of School



Resources



1. ICLE Case Studies (2021). <https://catholicliberaleducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ICLE-Case-Studies.pdf>
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8. Karnes, M., Shewedel, A., & Williams, M. (1983). A comparison of five approaches for educating young children from low-income homes. In Consortium for Longitudinal Studies (Ed.), *As the twig is bent: lasting effects of preschool programs* (pp. 133–171). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
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10. <https://therapytips.org/interviews/are-montessori-schools-better-than-public-schools>
11. Lillard, Angeline S. (2012). Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. *Journal of School Psychology*.