



BETHANY

LUTHERAN SCHOOL

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW 2018-2019

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Bethany Lutheran School is committed to providing a progressive, research-supported education for our students. In 2017, we began implementing instructional changes across the curriculum and in grades K-8 to reflect the paradigm shift in education from a system of lecture, isolated study, memorization, and regurgitation to one of high academic expectations, analysis, teamwork, communication, and creativity. As a private school, Bethany Lutheran School has the latitude to innovate and determine what works best for our students and implement curricular changes as needed.

One of our primary goals at BLS is to provide a 21st century education for our students. We work with our students to develop 21st century skills – communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking – that go beyond the content and that they will be able to draw on throughout their schooling and future careers.

At BLS, we know that curriculum is not a textbook, although well-researched, thoughtfully designed textbooks are a great resource for teachers. Curriculum encompasses not only the materials that are used for instruction but also includes the overall plan for instruction, the instructional strategies and practices, the standards, and the underlying philosophies and ethos of the school. Teachers develop curriculum by using textbooks, original documents, magazines, media, non-fiction, fiction, all available resources, strategies, and design skills to create an engaging, challenging environment for every student. What a teacher prepares, presents, and assesses is curriculum. There is freedom for a professional teacher within a professional learning community to investigate research-based methods and materials, remain innovative, and while determining how best to serve their students. In fact, our expectation at BLS of ourselves is that every teacher and administrator is him/herself a critical thinker, communicator, collaborator, and creator in the school environment.

In addition to the state content standards, BLS draws from Core Knowledge Standards & Sequencing (CKSS) to inform instruction in all subjects. We are gradually phasing in the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS); California recently adopted the NGSS to replace the previous state science content standards. We are committed to having a standard because that provides for accountability but we are equally committed to always nudging students to the next level, going beyond state or national expectations in grade level content standards. Our students are learning, practicing, and applying the skills of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity in reading, science, math, history, writing, arts, biblical study, and more while also wrestling with worldview; these are all foundational to becoming a self-reflective member of society.

“The Core Knowledge Sequence is a detailed outline of specific content and skills to be taught in language arts, history, geography, mathematics, science, and the fine arts. As the core of a school’s curriculum, it is intended to provide a coherent, content specific foundation of learning, while allowing flexibility to meet local needs. The Sequence represents an effort to describe and state the specific core of shared knowledge that all children should learn in U.S. schools, and that speakers and writers assume their audience knows. It should be emphasized that the Core Knowledge Sequence is not a list of facts to be memorized. Rather, it is a guide to coherent content from grade to grade, designed to encourage cumulative academic progress as children build their knowledge and skills from one year to the next. The Core Knowledge Sequence is distinguished by its specificity. While other standards provide general guidelines concerning what students should be able to do, they typically offer little help to teachers in detailing specific content or skills. The Sequence provides a solid foundation on which to build instruction. Moreover, because the Sequence offers a coherent plan that builds year by year, it helps prevent the many repetitions and gaps in instruction that often result from vague curricular guidelines,” (Hirsch Jr. , 2013).

The Core Knowledge Sequence is not meant to outline the whole of a school’s curriculum, but rather to provide a coherently organized plan for content and skills instruction, while remaining flexible enough to not exclude locally determined or other required content and skills. Effective Core Knowledge teachers recognize that topics from the Sequence must not be eliminated or changed from one grade level to another. The topics in the Sequence have been carefully chosen

to ensure educational equity. We want all students, advantaged and disadvantaged alike, to share in the common knowledge that can lead to success. “Picking and choosing” elements of the Sequence Introduction or taking out topics can lead to the very inequities we wish to avoid. Core Knowledge is an integrated and sequenced curriculum approach that builds over time. Leaving out some of the building blocks will inevitably weaken the foundation for future learning. The Core Knowledge Day-by-Day Planner was designed to assist teachers in pacing and planning all topics on a given grade level, while providing a format in which you can add locally determined or other required content and skills.

Instructional practice is the most important part of any curriculum. At BLS, we are committed to best instructional practices that lead to both content knowledge and development of 21st century skills. All of our teachers are receiving Master Teacher training. This research-based model supports instruction across content areas that are rich in content and high-level vocabulary, promotes higher level learning and metacognition, encourages gradual release of responsibility, and embodies 21st century learning. The Master Teacher program is a powerful instructional model that sets high standards and high expectations for all students and fosters student engagement and learning with understanding across content areas.

The Core Knowledge Sequence, coupled with the Master Teacher approach, emphasizes solving one’s problems, respecting others, and making good choices. Students are expected to explain their thinking (prove it!) and be metacognitive learners. “Metacognition refers to people’s abilities to predict their performances on various tasks and to monitor their current levels of mastery and understanding” (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Metacognitive learners are able to think about their own learning: Does this make sense? How am I doing? What am I doing well? What can I do better?

As a Christian school, we believe in transformative education that not only addresses cognitive development but a child’s spiritual, physical, and civic development. We want to partner with parents to help children achieve their potential as well-rounded individuals. Our elementary and secondary students have been involved in charitable endeavors through CTI Ministries, supporting our adopted missionary in Africa, local outreach opportunities as well as other projects providing

books, clothing, money, and essential items to people less fortunate than themselves. We expect the best behavior from our students and try to administer discipline in loving and firm ways that encourage our students to make right decisions. This learning environment that we endeavor to create for our students enables our teaching professionals to engage in an overall curriculum that promotes higher level thinking and lifelong learning.

Elementary

BLS has adopted a rigorous math approach and program. Built around the State of California content requirements, BLS utilizes a math program that focuses on depth rather than breadth, building conceptual foundations, and most importantly, engagement in the process and application of math concepts. Math Expressions (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) has been designed to reflect the way children learn mathematics. It provides a solid conceptual base that is grounded in over 20 years of research. Students are expected to problem solve, explain their thinking, and prove their answers. Each unit begins with an inquiry-based activity to activate thinking, access prior knowledge, and address preconceptions. Foundational to our mathematics instruction is the understanding that there are multiple paths to solving a problem. Providing a math learning environment that goes beyond memorization, rote learning, and basic computation allows students to learn with understanding which then leads to transference and the ability to apply learning in new situations. Additionally, students receive additional math enrichment once a week during a 60-minute math lab. Math lab reinforces math learning through math centers, games, logic, and other activities.

English language arts (ELA) curriculum reflects a workshop framework: students reading and writing across genres, making textual connections, and communicating those ideas in various ways. Primary grades engage in a literature-based program, California Journey's (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) that emphasizes skill development (phonics, comprehension, text structures, etc.) with a particular focus on vocabulary development (the greatest predictor of academic achievement) and learning the language of workshop.

As students move into upper elementary, students read at their independent reading levels and engage in guided reading at their instructional level. They are expected to respond orally and in

writing to the texts they read. This framework provides students with instruction in the many genres of texts, strategies for metacognition, and opportunities to practice these skills. Students set personal goals for becoming better readers and writers; through extensive and close reading, guided reading, conferring and daily writing students actively work toward achieving those goals. The following link provides a path to research articles that provide the foundation for reading and writing workshop: <http://readingandwritingproject.com/about/research-base.html>. Additional links provide background for reading and writing workshop: <http://www.readersworkshop.org/> and http://busyteacherscafe.com/literacy/writing_workshop.html.

Word Study and Grammar help students recognize patterns in the English language to inform their reading and writing. Word Study is very different from the traditional spelling test. Word Study focuses on identifying the spelling and meaning patterns in the English language to learn how to spell and infer meaning of words so that students can transfer this knowledge to previously unknown and unseen words. Grammar is taught within the context so that students learn to recognize how grammar changes meaning. Mentor texts provide the context for targeted CKS instruction in grammar.

The California CCSS language standards require students to learn to print legibly, and beginning in grade three, write legibly in cursive. We use Zaner Boser Handwriting program that begins with printing and in later grades transitions into cursive. Zaner Boser printing provides a natural progression into cursive writing. Even in this age of technology, it is important for individuals to be able to handwrite legibly. Dr. William Klemm (2013), a professor of neuroscience at Texas A & M University, describes the many developmental and psychological benefits of learning cursive including sensory-motor coordination, cognitive demand which benefits thinking processes, the engagement of both hemispheres of the brain, and developing tactics for learning in general.

Students receive social studies and science content instruction from their classroom teachers. Our social studies and science textbooks are California standards-based and published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Field trips, projects, and other media and materials provide additional enrichment for these content areas. California content standards inform instruction but the CKS ELA standards play an integral part in the instruction of social studies and science as well. CKS literacy standards are embedded in content instruction through rigorous instructional strategies.

We have adopted a new science program in the Fall 2017 in anticipation of California's adoption of programs in 2018-2019 that are based on the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Science instruction is evolving at BLS to mirror the national and local focus on STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. The new science programs emphasize STEM learning and provide students with multiple opportunities to engage in the engineering process throughout the year. Currently, students in grades 1-5 are utilizing Science Fusion (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) which has both an extensive digital program and hardcover components.

The Bible program, One in Christ (Concordia Publishing), is focused on character building through Old and New Testament stories and learning scripture. Beginning in first grade One in Christ, not only focuses on character development but on understanding the foundations of a Christian worldview through the building of the House of Truth. The content of the curriculum affirms the metanarrative of Scripture: (1) God created all things good. At creation, all things were in harmony. (2) At the Fall (Genesis 3), the whole created order fell into disharmony due to the disobedience of man. (3) In the person of Jesus Christ, God began the process of redemption and renewal. (4) In the end, God will restore all things through his Son Jesus Christ.

In the interest of developing the whole child, all students receive bi-weekly instruction in music, computer skills, and physical education. In third grade, students learn to play the recorder. Students may then opt to participate in either symphonic band or hand bells beginning in the fourth grade in addition to classroom music.

Middle School

Bethany Lutheran School has been actively implementing CKS ideals since 2008. Changes in text resources and, most importantly, professional development over the years since have focused on making this paradigm shift in order to prepare BLS students for success in higher education and careers of the future.

BLS has adopted math curriculum that focuses on depth rather than breadth, conceptual foundations, and most important, process and application of mathematical concepts. The CSS for mathematical practice are reflected in the secondary math courses. Students are expected to explain

their thinking, demonstrate their process, understand that there can be multiple paths to the same solution, and make real world applications. Mastery projects allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of math concepts and processes. Students may progress through geometry by eight grade.

English courses continue to reflect the CSS ELA standards through the reading and analysis of key literature of various genres. Students further develop their literacy skills with a continued emphasis on vocabulary development and understanding the role of grammar in conveying the desired meaning. Teachers cultivate clear communication and critical Updated 7/7/17 thinking by providing opportunities for students to practice writing for different purposes and audiences. Frequent writing builds stamina, confidence, and skill while encouraging student to engage in thoughtful and meaningful discourse.

California content standards and the NGSS inform content but the CKS ELA standards play an integral part in the instruction of social studies and science as well. CKS literacy standards are embedded in content instruction through Master Teacher and CKS instructional strategies.

Bible courses are an integral, required part of our academically rigorous middle school program and continue with a focus on worldview. One in Christ (Concordia) curriculum explicitly informs instruction in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade Bible courses. Fifth and sixth grade students focus on the Old Testament, while seventh and eighth grade focus on the Gospel and on apologetics. Whatever the course, BLS affirms the metanarrative of Scripture: (1) God created all things good. At creation, all things were in harmony. (2) At the Fall (Genesis 3), the whole created order fell into disharmony due to the disobedience of man. (3) In the person of Jesus Christ, God began the process of redemption and renewal. (4) In the end, God will restore all things through his Son Jesus Christ.

Physical education, world languages (Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL)), and a wide variety of fine arts courses (beginning band, advanced band). Other special electives include Art Appreciation, Photography, Cooking, and Video Production.

Final Note

Every year, Bethany Lutheran School evaluates its curriculum in regards to appropriateness and rigor, texts and materials, and instructional practices. While there is no perfect curriculum, the materials BLS provides to our faculty are meant as quality tools for providing instruction to our students. As professionals trained to instruct and educate children, teachers make instructional decisions to use the strengths of the materials and supplement the weaknesses to provide the most balanced, research supported, and standards-based instruction to their students. In our continuing effort to improve on and provide an excellent education grounded in a biblical worldview, both the administrative and instructional staff at BLS are committed to best instructional practices and making the changes necessary to achieve this goal.