

For those of you, who did not have a chance to attend the PTO meeting on October 7th, the Education Team put together a Q&A page based on questions that came up at the meeting and questions that we received since the meeting.

Q: What drives instruction at St. Monica Catholic School?

A: Instruction is driven by the Curriculum Standards issued by the Catholic School Office of the Diocese of Dallas.

Q: Where do I find the Diocesan Curriculum Standards?

A: You can find it [here](#) as well as in the presentation and on the SMS website under Academics, Curriculum.

Q: Tell us about the Fountas & Pinnell reading program.

A: Fountas & Pinnell (F&P) is one of the tools we utilize for advancing our students in the area of reading. We do not use a particular “program” when it comes to reading instruction, or any subject. What we do use is the Diocesan Standards (curriculum) and tailor our resources to meet these standards. We utilize some components of the F&P resources as one of the several instructional tools.

Q: How do children learn to read at St. Monica Catholic School?

A: Learning to read requires structured, balanced, sequential, comprehensive and systematic instruction. Reading research supports a strong phonics foundation, coupled with comprehension skills instruction. Most children would not achieve fluency without receiving a solid foundation in phonics. Word reading fluency and automaticity are necessary for comprehension. Students who are not fluent readers, tend to struggle with comprehending more complex texts. Phonics is introduced to children at St. Monica in Pre-K3, and systematically taught starting at age 4 in Pre-K, continuing on a daily basis through 3rd grade. Please refer to slide/page 9 to see a visual representation of the two major components of teaching reading/literacy skills at St. Monica Catholic School.

Q: What resources are you using to teach reading/literature?

A: For Phonics instruction we have been using the current edition of “Saxon Phonics” for the last 15 years, perhaps more. It has been updated several times; we purchased the latest edition last summer. Saxon is used in most of the Diocesan schools as well. It is a strong phonics/word study program that has all the components necessary to teach emergent readers. The components are phonological and phonemic awareness, decoding skills, morphology, spelling, word reading fluency, and sight word recognition.

When it comes to comprehension skills instruction, we must keep the ultimate goal in mind: our students should become avid readers who are able to derive meaning from text. Our responsibility is to help them develop the knowledge and skills that they need to become enthusiastic and competent readers. To achieve this, we pull from a number of resources: F&P guided reading and shared reading collections (in the lower school only), classroom libraries, online resources, Scholastic book collections across grade levels.

Q: I am worried about the progressive nature of the content that my 6th grader was exposed to through a F&P book at the beginning of the school year.

A: We do **not** have F&P resources in the middle school at all. The book in question was mistakenly assigned in 6th grade and immediately withdrawn from the school library after the questionable content came to our attention. The book is **not** a part of any F&P or other collection we purchased for literature instruction. It came from an independent book list and was purchased by the library in 2012. The book has been withdrawn from our library's shelves.

Q: How do you make sure that classroom libraries **in the lower school** do not have any books with anti-christian, progressive or violent contents?

A: All the titles purchased by St. Monica for classroom libraries have been vetted. Out of the hundreds of books we purchased recently, we found only one that did not meet our expectations, therefore, was never added to the classroom library.

Q: Who picks the summer reading books?

A: Traditionally, the teachers choose the books they require the student to read over the summer.

Q: Why was the book *My Brother Sam is Dead* chosen for 6th grade summer reading? Is it possible to have other options? It seems too violent for my child.

A: The book *My Brother Sam is Dead* is an award winning Newbery Honor book written by James and Christopher Collier, first published by Scholastic in 1974. It is a historical fiction depicting the American Revolution and the moral dilemmas of a young boy who is forced to choose between the two sides. The book has been chosen by teachers at St. Monica as a 6th grade summer reading novel for over a decade. This summer the first time we were told by some of the parents that the book was disturbing for their child. We completely understand and will make sure in the future that teachers will provide a few title options. Perhaps it is a better fit for 7th grade, or, not at all for some students. Providing options is most definitely a feasible solution. This is good feedback and we appreciate it!

Q: My child came home with a "Stop and Think" form a few days ago. Would you tell me about the purpose of these forms?

A: "Stop and Think" forms are a part of our Virtues-based Restorative Discipline (VBRD) behavior management program. Students learn about a new virtue each month. A "Stop and Think" form is given to a student when there is a need to restore a damaged relationship.

Q: What math resources do we use at St. Monica Catholic School?

A: Primarily teachers use Savvas Envision, but teachers have access to other math resources to add to the students' math learning experiences. Students have access to manipulatives to visualize math concepts.

Q: How do we instruct math at St. Monica Catholic School?

A: Teachers foster number sense, critical thinking, and math reasoning skills by modeling and teaching using a variety of strategies and resources. Once students learn different strategies, they apply those concepts to solve problems. Using the Diocesan curriculum standards to drive their math instruction, teachers focus on teaching students math processes and problem solving through authentic activities and learning experiences.

Q: How many times a week are elective classes held?

A: Twice a week, Mondays and Fridays, 8th period.

Q: Can my child stay in the same elective for the 2nd quarter?

A: Students should choose a different elective every quarter. Electives are exploratory, so students are encouraged to explore different classes. However, the Band elective is a four quarter commitment and has an outside fee attached to it. Remaining in Conversations in Spanish elective is encouraged since learning a foreign language requires consistency throughout the school year. Students may choose this elective throughout the school year if they wish.

Q: Does the “Conversations in Spanish” elective replace middle school Spanish classes?

A: No, it does not! All middle school students take 2 Spanish classes per week. Those who choose “Conversations in Spanish” as an elective, increase their number of Spanish classes to 4 classes per week.

Q: When can we expect the STEM Lab in place?

A: Hopefully, at the beginning of the next semester. The STEM lab purchase order is ready to be signed. As soon as the expected EANS funds are released, we will be able to submit the order. Depending on the supply chain, we should have the lab in place in a short time from the date of order.

Q: Since we do not have a STEM Lab yet, does it mean that my child is not taking STEM classes?

A: All K-8 students have scheduled weekly STEM classes. The lower school and the middle school STEM teachers use a variety of resources and STEM activities to maintain instruction, however, they are definitely looking forward to having access to a state-of-the-art STEM space in the near future.

Q: My child uses extended time accommodations for testing. Will he/she be able to receive extended time during IOWA testing?

A: Yes. All students with accommodations, such as oral testing, extended time will receive the same accommodations during IOWA testing.

Q: Will middle school students take the IOWA tests in their advisory group? How does this work with mixed grade levels?

A: The instructions that teachers give throughout the testing are the same from 4th through 8th grades. The same instructions are read to a 4th grader as to an 8th grader. The advisory groups are **not** randomly formed groups of students that could intimidate the students. They spend their daily advisory times together. The tests are all timed the same, so students begin and end testing at the same time.

We will continue to send you updates regarding academics, extra curricular activities and new initiatives and programs adopted at St. Monica.