

What is Sioux Falls Christian Schools' Curriculum?

. . . neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow (1 Corinthians 3:7).

The curriculum is the totality of what goes on during the educational process, and it includes many sources of information. Our main source is God's word. Our curriculum is designed first and foremost around God's Word as the foundation. Christ is to be the center and the focus of all education that occurs.

The teacher's words, handouts, and activities that go on in the classroom are an essential part of the curriculum. A textbook is another part of the curriculum, though is not the curriculum itself. Other elements can include outside readings, news sources, online resources, community professionals, library books, magazine articles All of these elements, along with a solid partnership with the home and church, work together to contribute to the educational process.

"With God's Word as our foundation, Sioux Falls Christian Schools (SFCS) will provide a Christ-centered, excellent education, partnering with the church and home to equip students for service to Him." These are not just words on a page to show we have a mission statement; these words filter all decisions that are made about our school, including curriculum.

When deciding upon curriculum and textbooks at Sioux Falls Christian, a team of people, including SFC administration, teachers, and education committee members, review many sources and plan for effective implementation. Curriculum includes a variety of tools that help students learn through effective teaching methods and strategies. The tools chosen are those found to best equip students to effectively impact others for Christ throughout their life wherever in this world God leads them.

Planned Curriculum

Curriculum maps for each content area outline the planned curriculum and give specific direction for teachers to follow throughout the school year. Teachers plan developmentally appropriate units and lesson plans that originate from objective-based curriculum guides.

The planned curriculum is based on three main components: Our philosophical base, standards for the curricular area, and a standard measure of the curriculum. Resources and textbooks are chosen based on those that best meet these components.

1. A strong philosophical base is needed to place the entire curriculum upon a solid foundation. At Sioux Falls Christian, our philosophical based is a solid Biblical worldview based on Truth found in the scriptures (see SFC Statements of Basic Beliefs and Purposes). Truth begins with God in the form of His Son Jesus. Every goal, objective, teaching method and resource is filtered through the book of all Truth, the Bible. A strong Biblical philosophical base ensures a strong curriculum foundation.
2. Recommended Curriculum: The State of South Dakota has state content standards for every core subject area. These content standards have been researched and put together by education professionals. While SFC is not required to teach the state content standards, these standards provide a solid starting place and help us ensure our students can navigate successfully in our world in order to impact others for Christ. We follow the state standards that fit with our mission and do not contradict God's Word.
3. Standard Measure of the Curriculum: SFC uses various tools to assess the curriculum. We also use a standardized assessment to measure how SFC students perform compared

to other students in the United States. This also helps to ensure our curriculum is helping our students successfully prepare for their future. Assessing our curriculum through a reputable outside organization provides accountability to help our school continue to provide excellence in education.

These three components create our planned curriculum. In faith, and with Christ as our guide, these components unfold into the living curriculum each day, with the teachers and students in the classrooms.

Living Curriculum

The teaching professionals at SFC depend on God to help them nurture the students in their care and to daily provide the living curriculum. Professional knowledge of brain-based learning strategies, students' varying abilities, and multiple assessment strategies allow teachers to understand the wide range of instructional needs and to provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for each child in the classroom. Teachers' professional and Biblical knowledge, their personal testimony, and training to deliver their content through a Biblical framework, work together to create a Christ-centered living curriculum.

An effective teacher is motivated by love and provides experiences, promotes discovery and presents truth. As the teacher faithfully serves, God trains the heart, engages the mind and releases the spirit.

Learned Curriculum

Each strategy used within the program must have a way to assess effective learning. The learned curriculum reveals the quantity and quality of learning that has taken place within the students. Teachers are encouraged to assess student learning using a variety of methods, which can include formal and informal observations, paper and pencil testing, projects, creative writing, oral response, cooperative learning, art, technology, and others. Just as students learn differently, teachers must keep in mind that students test differently. The goal is to assess the actual learning that is taking place within each student and make any necessary adjustments needed to meet the needs of each child within the constraints of our program.

Concluding Comments

While the components of our curricular philosophy work together, steps within the process are subject to various conditions. As humans, we may try things that fail; we may make incorrect judgments or mistakes along the way. In light of this, the approach to curriculum must be one of humility and dependency on God. The primary task of the curriculum is to plant seeds and water the plants so God can cause growth and produce eternal fruit. When this happens, students will embrace a Biblical worldview and impact their community, nation and world for Christ.

Frequently Asked Questions

How is SFC ensuring in every classroom that the curriculum is Biblically centered?

“With God’s Word as our foundation, SFCS will provide a Christ-centered, excellent education . . . These are not just words on a page; they filter all decisions at SFC, including curriculum. God’s Word **IS** the foundation, and Christ is central in the educational process at SFC.

How do we ensure this? First and foremost, it is our top priority to ensure that every teacher at SFC has a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, has a firm Biblical worldview, and fully supports and believes in the value of Christian education. The hiring process includes many checkpoints that seek knowledge of applicants’ relationship with Christ and their involvement in a local Biblically-based church.

Second, teachers must document in their curriculum maps how they will implement their faith into each unit they teach. These statements are alongside and included in essential questions for each unit, which are the focal point for learning in each unit – the critical pieces that teachers want students to take away. The curriculum outlines can be found at http://app.curriculumtrak.com/client/curriculum_map/public/view.cfm?memberid=424. Building principals visit classrooms regularly, and are able to see Christ-centered education in process. In the evaluation process, teachers are held accountable for faith implementation. A Master Teacher Framework that guides teacher growth and evaluation at SFC contains multiple faith indicators. This framework can be found at <http://goo.gl/7o4Sgv>.

In addition, SFC staff is currently in the process of developing a comprehensive Biblical Worldview Framework that will help ensure a very intentional, systematic process of revealing and connecting to biblical truth to every stage of the curriculum. Of course, as humans we won’t always implement these processes perfectly, but we will work hard every day to approach our curriculum with humility and dependency on God.

How often is curricula reviewed and what is the process?

Though our curriculum is constantly being evaluated and adapted, most subjects undergo an extensive review every 5-7 years. Subject areas that change quickly, such as technology, are reviewed more often in order to stay current. A team of teachers and administrators is formed. Samples of various curriculum options are ordered and reviewed. The curriculum committee uses SFC’s mission statement and a curricular rubric to determine which tools will best equip students to effectively impact others for Christ wherever in this world God leads them.

To what standards does SFC align?

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Why are secular resources sometimes used?

During the review process, the curricular team reviews many curricular options. Using SFC’s mission statement and a curricular rubric, they determine which options will best equip students to effectively impact others for Christ in our world. When secular resources are found to be the most effective tools for academic preparation, they may be selected. However, no text or resource on its own makes up the curriculum. God’s Word is always the main text, and every classroom is facilitated by a Christian professional educator who delivers Christ-centered education. In addition, awareness of secular viewpoints is seen as a necessary tool to help equip students to effectively defend their faith and address a world that may hold differing views. Regardless, a Christ-centered education remains the highest priority.

What is Sioux Falls Christian Schools Stance on Technology?

Each pillar of our vision statement (LG3) is easily connected to technology. We need our students to learn to **love** each other in person, but also online. We need them to **grow** in their knowledge of God's world as it is today. We need them to **go** into all the world (even places like cyberspace) and make disciples of all nations. There is already a lot of **glorifying** happening with technology, but the goal for our students is to make our Lord the object of our worship, rather than self.

Why does SFC use technology on a regular basis?

To equip students for service to God (part of our mission statement), we feel the calling to help students grow in their ability to use technology discerningly as a tool for further learning, communication, collaboration, and creation.

Why is SFC planning on pursuing a 1:1 initiative, with each student having regular access to a device?

We have reached a crucial point in our school's history, with regard to technology integration and how it impacts an "excellent education". We have sought to maximize the capacity of innovative learning opportunities that exist, using labs and mobile labs of computers within our building. We now feel that a major barrier to fulfilling our mission is the somewhat limited access that students have to technology in school.

In addition, in a recent poll that was taken of parents of middle and high school students at Sioux Falls Christian, the results demonstrated a great deal of support from our families. 25% of our parents completely support a 1-to-1 initiative, 42% strongly support it, and 23% moderately support it.

Finally, the past few years the administration and staff have made a concerted effort to provide teachers with several hours of professional development training. From this effort, we have reaped much benefit already. We have also found that this is making access to the technology an even greater need. Teachers are seeing student technology as a powerful, meaningful learning tool.

What should I do as a parent if I have a particular concern regarding curriculum or standards used in the classroom?

1) Please first visit with your child's teacher. Oftentimes questions and concerns can be easily resolved by simply getting clarification from the teacher. We want to keep those doors of communication open and effective. The Biblical example for communication tells us to go to the source first. When given an opportunity to share their heart, you'll usually find out that the teacher is working hard to provide the best Christ-centered education he or she can. That doesn't mean that improvement can't be made or isn't desired. We just hope that all parties involved approach conversations with honesty and grace. For more information, you may also view all curriculum outlines online at the SFC website.

2) If you are still uncertain or have concerns, the next best step is to visit with your child's principal. The principal takes questions and concerns very seriously and works hard to ensure that the best education possible is provided for your child. Because the principal is working to meet the needs of many students at one time, the answer you're hoping for may not be the answer that best meets the needs of most students. This does not mean that the principal is not listening to your questions or concerns, but that he or she must consider all students in the decisions that are made.

3) If after meeting with the teacher and the principal, you still believe your questions or concerns need to be addressed, the next best step is to visit with the superintendent.

4.) After the superintendent, the next step is to visit with a school board member. The school board member can serve as an objective ear, and can be an intermediary voice. Hopefully, utilizing these steps in this order can resolve any questions or issues that arise.