

Dear Lower School CEC Parents,

I am very excited to be able to serve you this year as the new Dean of Faculty and Curriculum, Lower School, at Sacred Heart Academy. I am coming from twelve years teaching experience in Catholic and classical schools. I have spent the last eight years teaching 4th grade in a classical academy similar to Sacred Heart. In that program our students consistently scored in the 99th national percentile in math and reading.

I am no stranger to homeschooling, either. My parents were pioneers in the homeschool movement during the 1980s, and I was homeschooled for several years. My wife, Katy, and I homeschooled our 9 year old son last year, and I have networked with homeschoolers for many years.

I am writing to introduce you to some adjustments we are making to the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade CEC program. I have spoken with a number of you parents and your CEC faculty at Sacred Heart Academy and we are working together to better serve your needs.

We have made some changes to the reading and math curriculum in the fulltime program and we would be remiss if those improvements did not span over into the CEC program. We see no reason why our homeschool families would not meet or exceed our full time standards.

I will be working very hard this year to communicate our expectations better and give you the structural support you need, as well as the flexibility, in order to take advantage of the opportunities homeschooling has to offer.

We thank you for your continued patience during this time of transition. We at Sacred Heart Academy want to reiterate our commitment to your success as homeschool parents. To this end, I will be available to support you through this school year so that you can thrive as a homeschool family within the CEC program! My wife, Katy, and I will be homeschooling our son, John, through the 4th grade CEC program this year, so I will get a taste of my own medicine. My point is to reassure you that we are in this together.

Weekly Lesson Plan

We are very happy to announce that you will receive a weekly lesson plan from our 2nd, 3rd, & 4th grade CEC teachers this year. This weekly lesson plan sheet will be sent home on Thursdays to ensure you have all the necessary assignments and information for the following week. This lesson plan will mimic the same assignments and expectations we have for full-time, with one exception: most of the assignments will be optional (recommended), giving you the ability to make the curriculum fit your student's real needs.

Core Subjects

In order to provide consistency, structure, flow, and rhythm to your homeschool schedule, there will be a minimum requirement to complete the core subjects: math, reading, spelling, and vocabulary. One of

the great advantages of having a CEC program is that, no matter what unscheduled events may take place at home, parents can rest assured that their children are not going to fall behind academically.

You may find it a relief to know that it is sometimes ok to skip the recommended portion of the curriculum or make your own substitutes. You may also find it helpful to know that there are a few subjects your children absolutely need to complete every day, in order to keep up with the class.

We are calling these mandatory subjects the core. They are math, reading, spelling, and vocabulary. These core subjects should not take more than two hours a day to complete, allowing plenty of time for other studies.

Math

I have had many discussions with parents and faculty about our lower school math curriculum. After carefully reviewing our Singapore edition and other programs, we have decided to introduce Saxon Math as the foundation of our full-time program, grades 1-6. We hope this new program will better meet our school needs.

Saxon Math has been used successfully in the homeschool community for decades. It is an excellent fit for homeschool families because it is very easy to use. Whereas Singapore math has some advantages when it comes to introducing new concepts – moving from the concrete to the abstract, it takes several days of training to be able to teach well.

Saxon math has the primary advantage of being self-explanatory for both students and parents. Our sense is that this will be a better fit for our teacher/parent partnership in the CEC program. I have worked with many families over the years that love Saxon math. Saxon builds mastery through repetition – a perfect fit for the grammar stage (Polly Parrot) of the Trivium.

The fulltime and CEC teachers received two days of Singapore training this month. It was excellent training and even though we have decided not to use Singapore as our math program we are very excited about the capability of our teachers to explain math concepts to our students in multiple ways, including Singapore methods. We see this step as a win-win situation for all. The goal is mastery of elementary addition, subtraction, multiplication and division characterized by confident understanding, speed, and accuracy.

I apologize for the late notice that we will not be using the Singapore textbooks and workbooks, as planned. You may return them or hold on to them if you wish to supplement the Saxon program at home.

Please order the following books as soon as possible:

2nd Grade Saxon Workbook set (\$36.25)

- <http://www.hmhco.com/shop/k12/Saxon-Math-2/9780939798827>

3rd Grade Saxon Workbook set (\$36.25)

– <http://www.hmhco.com/shop/k12/Saxon-Math-3/9780939798834>

4th Grade Saxon – A graph paper composition notebook. (\$4) SHA will loan the textbooks and provide the test materials.

Spelling

A weekly spelling list will go home on Thursdays for the following week. Your teachers will explain how to use that in more detail, but the spelling program is not complicated. Students have Monday-Wednesday to memorize their spelling words for the week. On Thursdays there will be a spelling bee in the classroom and on Fridays you give them their spelling test at home.

Vocabulary

Similarly, a weekly vocabulary list will go home on Thursdays for the following week. Students have Monday-Wednesday to memorize their vocabulary words. On Thursdays there will be a vocabulary bee and on Fridays you will give them their test at home. The weekly vocabulary test will be provided by your CEC teacher.

Reading

The most important gift you can give your child during this stage of development is reading mastery. Reading is the gateway to independent learning. For clarity, I will distinguish between three types of reading: oral reading, independent reading, and read aloud. All three are essential for reading development.

At the heart of this program is daily oral reading. Your child needs to read out loud to you for at least 10-15 minutes a day. You will want to sit down one-on-one with your child and have him read to you without any distractions. Oral reading time means you are off limits to your other children. You need to be able to give him your undivided attention. I will discuss this in detail at the parent orientation night. For further instruction in how to maximize this time with your child, I recommend *Reading Rescue 1-2-3* by Peggy Wilber (\$9.58 on Amazon). The goals are to ensure your child reads fluently and comprehends what he is reading.

Note: As part of the 2nd grade CEC reading program, Mrs. Fagan will send home phonics work for your child, as well.

Independent reading is equally important. Your 2nd/3rd/4th grade student should be reading 1-3 hours a day on his own, at his reading level. I realize that this seems like a lot of reading, but I assure you that this time investment will pay big dividends in the long run! Your child will be reading for about two and a half hours a day on CEC days. Independent reading includes fiction and non-fiction reading - religion, science, and history count as part of that 1-3 hour commitment.

Read aloud is the most enjoyable for all. I highly recommend that you spend 20-60 minutes a day reading as a family. You will want to select a timeless classic for this portion - something that engages all

of your children. I recommend *A Landscape with Dragons*, by Michael O'Brien for further guidance in selecting excellent works. This read aloud can be done by a parent or older student and is essential for filling the memory with excellent vocabulary and well-constructed phrases of the English language.

Other Subjects

In addition to the core, CEC students will be studying more subjects this year on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Latin, music, classics, Saint's lives, history, science, grammar, and penmanship will be taught in a self-contained manner at school, without homework. What you do with these subjects at home is optional but we will include in the weekly lesson plan what the fulltime students are doing in these subjects and we recommend that you do as much or more, as you are able.

I will put together a full recommended curriculum book list for you as soon as I am able, but I apologize that it will not be this week. My goal is to have it to you by mid-September. In the meantime, thank you for your patience as we re-launch the lower school math and reading program. I look forward to meeting you soon!

Sincerely in Christ,
Christopher Warner
Dean of Faculty and Curriculum, Lower School