

Let's Build Something Beautiful!



MISSION, MODEL & CURRICULUM



ST. MICHAEL HIGH SCHOOL
A CHESTERTON ACADEMY

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I. Mission & Model

The St. Michael mission is to nurture and elevate a new generation of joyful leaders educated in the classical tradition and the truth of the Catholic faith.

Inspired by Pope St. John Paul II, the Chesterton Schools Network takes as its motto *Cultura Vitae*, ‘the culture of life.’ Our mission at **St. Michael High School**, a *Chesterton Academy*, is to prepare students to triumph over the materialism and despair that pervade our culture and to accept our Lord’s offer to have life and to have it abundantly. We strive to help students develop the skills and character requisite for success in college and professional life, and to excel in service of family, of country, and of Christ.

To that end we seek to form our students:

- **Intellectually**, by teaching not only the great classics of Western thought from philosophy to physics, but the interrelationship of the great ideas, teaching not merely what to think but how to think;
- **In character**, especially in the four cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice, which we believe are the foundation of leadership;
- **And spiritually**, to use the skills they acquire at St. Michael in faith, hope, and charity to build up the Kingdom of God in this life and be with Him in everlasting happiness in the next.

THE CLASSICAL EDUCATION MODEL

St. Michael students enjoy a cohesive, content-rich education which exposes them to many different disciplines through the Classical Education Model. Through the great works of Western Civilization, a classical model imparts essential knowledge in an ordered way. In the humanities, students progress chronologically from antiquity to the modern age. In math and science, learning begins with observation and basic skills and advances toward greater complexity and abstraction.

The classical model also teaches important real-world skills such as writing and public speaking, using examples from the very greatest thinkers. It also cultivates within students the intellectual virtues of confidence, patience, perseverance, and humility.

Classical education prepares students for success in college, trade school, the military, entrepreneurship, or the religious life. While classically educated students consistently fare well on standardized tests and college admission, our objective is not merely to get our students into college but into Heaven, where the admissions standards are much higher. In other words, we are preparing our students for life, both the earthly and the eternal, helping them find their vocation, discerning God’s call for their lives.

THE CHESTERTON MODEL

It begins with a classical, integrated curriculum. Students read the greats – from Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, to Dante, Shakespeare, and Dostoyevsky, among others. Our students study the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. History, literature, philosophy, and theology are braided together. The sciences and the humanities are also intimately connected, so that the logic of math is seen in philosophy, and God's handiwork is seen in the sciences. Faith and reason meet in every class.

Equal emphasis is given to the arts so that every student learns to draw and paint, sing in the choir, act on the stage, address an audience, and engage in debate. Each year builds upon the previous, so that by the end of senior year we have articulate, clear-thinking, well-rounded, and very importantly, joyful human beings.

HALLMARKS OF A CHESTERTON EDUCATION

At St. Michael High School, we create environments where students encounter Christ and experience His love, so they can, in turn, share His love with others. Students have the unique opportunity to experience an integrated life, which is a life of faith lived in community.

It is our sincere aim that students come to understand and embrace their fundamental purpose: to know God, to love Him, and to serve Him in this world and be happy with Him forever in the next.

We approach education in a particular way to meet this aim:

An Incarnational Environment. The central truth of the Incarnation – God becoming Man – is the central truth of the Chesterton education. From history and theology to math and science, the Incarnation is the central mystery we explore across the entire curriculum. It is our prayer and desire that each student would personally experience the Incarnation, that Christ would grow and mature within the heart of each student.

A Focus on Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. Classical education can be described as the cultivation of wisdom and virtue through meditation on the true, good, and beautiful. Our classical curriculum combines a broad, liberal arts education with a strong emphasis on the development of Christian virtues and an appreciation of beauty. It is our hope that our students will be able to proclaim the truth, goodness, and beauty of the Catholic faith as they encounter an increasingly dark and skeptical world that is so desperately in need of Jesus Christ.

A Joyful Learning Environment. We seek to create an environment where students experience the joy of community, of discovery, and of learning. We work to provide students with an opportunity to live out their spiritual life and grow in holiness. We hope to inspire lifelong learners, committed to building up joyful communities of faith as they mature into adulthood.

Rediscovering the Lost Tools of Learning. Becoming a more fluent reader, a more eloquent writer, and a better communicator should be primary goals of education. Our curriculum is centered on skills seemingly forgotten in modern society – reading, writing, oral presentations, and the development of critical reasoning skills through the study of logic and philosophy. By handing on these vital skills, we prepare students to lead and succeed, to transform the culture, to lead the nation, and to make all things new in Christ.

The Socratic Seminar. Learning happens in the shared discovery of ideas. The Socratic seminar is perhaps the oldest educational tool and the most highly regarded educational format. Through this method, a teacher guides students through directed questions and guided dialogue, bringing ideas and knowledge to life. Knowledge gained in this way is more meaningful to the student, makes a greater impact, and can be retained more easily than rote memorization.

The Wit and Wisdom of G.K. Chesterton. The Chesterton Schools Network is named for the great English writer and Catholic convert, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936). Chesterton is a model for our school because he exemplified the Catholic faith through a life filled with joy, wonder, and gratitude. His wit, clarity, kindness, and ability to love ideological opponents, while sharing the truths of the faith, make him an excellent guide for navigating the modern world. We aim to cultivate these virtues in our students.

Additionally, we are committed to a particular approach to technology, homework, and testing:

Technology. Computers are not typically used in our classrooms. We believe technology can aid in the learning process, but never more than that. Our preference is for students to read printed text, so they are more engaged with one another and avoid distraction in the classroom. Computers are used for independent study and guided projects and, naturally, students use computers at home for papers and other assignments.

Homework. We try to limit assigned homework. As an institution of education, we seek to be efficient in the learning process. Small class sizes and optimal learning environments enable us to work efficiently during class time. Homework typically is a combination of math drills or Latin memorization plus independent reading. Our goal is to foster a love of reading among our students. Therefore, independent reading assignments are balanced with texts read in class.

Testing. We foster the acquisition of long-term knowledge that is retained for the long-term. For that reason, we have developed a curriculum that is cumulative and optimized for retention. The Chesterton curriculum is a four-year conversation in which the students participate at an ever-deepening levels. We help students achieve mastery in individual skill sets so they can build an edifice of learning. We stress the interconnectedness of learning, such that no discipline is taught in isolation and each discipline makes the other stronger.

For information regarding specific courses offered at St. Michael High School, please see our *Course Catalog for the 2026-27 Academic Year*.

St. Michael High School is a proud member of the Chesterton Schools Network (CSN), the largest and fastest-growing association of Catholic Classical schools in America. We joined the network as its 13th member school in 2019. There are now 69 CSN member schools with 19 more set to open their doors in 2026 and an additional 20 schools on track to open in 2027. The CSN aims to inspire and encourage parent-led Catholic schools across the nation. Learn more at chestertonschoolsnetwork.org.

This document is based on portions of the *CSN Course Catalog*, edited to more precisely reflect our programs and offerings at St. Michael High School.

II. Curriculum by Discipline

St. Michael High School offers a unique educational approach through its classical, integrated curriculum. Our students enjoy a cohesive, content-rich experience that exposes them to a variety of disciplines and fields of inquiry. Below are descriptions of the major components of our curriculum, along with an overview of the specific disciplines and courses our students are asked to investigate and master.

HUMANITIES CURRICULUM

HISTORY

The history curriculum is the backbone of the four-year Chesterton curriculum. Each history course is tailored to provide a colorful backdrop for our literature, art, and science classes.

In Ancient History, we cover the period from Mesopotamians and Egyptians through the Greek and Roman civilizations. We view the background against which the Old Testament was written, and classical philosophy was developed. In Medieval History, we cover early Church history up to the High Middle Ages. Renaissance History begins with the High Middle Ages, which is probably one of the most important periods in world history and yet most neglected by other schools. We go on to cover the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. Modern History contrasts the age of exploration, the expansion of Christianity, and the founding of the American republic in the New World, with the revolt against Christianity via the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the Russian Revolution, across two World Wars and into the rise of rampant secularism in the modern era.

PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy, ‘the love of wisdom,’ exercises the brain while it elevates the soul. The ability to understand abstract concepts leads to clear and systematic thinking in all things. We use philosophy to connect the humanities, but also to show its obvious connection to logic and mathematics. We study the development of philosophy from its classical roots in Plato and Aristotle, through its dramatic encounter with the early Church, its christening by St. Thomas Aquinas, and its deterioration in the modern era.

THEOLOGY

Theology, ‘the study of God,’ is the context within which all other disciplines are studied. The principal theological texts studied are the Bible and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We also read selections from the Church Fathers, Documents of the Church councils, and papal encyclicals.

LITERATURE

Our study of literature is linked to our study of history and the rest of the humanities. In Ancient Literature, students are introduced to the classical epics of Homer. In Medieval Literature, they are exposed to early English classics such as the Canterbury Tales, as well as modern literary renderings of medieval history. In Renaissance Literature, students get healthy servings of Dante and Shakespeare. In Modern Literature, they read American literature, Dickens, Dostoyevsky, Hugo, and Chesterton. Reading and writing go together, of course, and in addition to developing an ear for poetry and narrative, students learn to master the essay in written assignments for all subjects.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE

All students are required to take two years of Latin. In addition, students are able to take two elective years of French as juniors and seniors. The school will offer Latin III for the first time in the Fall of 2026, and may also offer additional years of Latin and other languages as electives as staffing allows.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Focusing on functional physical ability, our Physical Education program, Iliad Athletics, seeks to maximize each student's physical potential. The Iliad fitness curriculum integrates a deliberate character-building framework connecting physical challenge to classical virtues. Employing tools used by the U.S. military and first responders, Iliad teaches leadership, team building, and innumerable other classic American virtues.

MATH & SCIENCE CURRICULUM

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics is the study of the intelligible order present in the quantitative aspects of our world. It is the foundation of the Quadrivium, part of the seven traditional liberal arts that prepare young minds for the study of higher things. Properly taught, Mathematics is uniquely suited to inspire students with the conviction that the truth can be known and that it is worth pursuing. It teaches logic, which is a basic philosophical principle. It teaches honesty, which is a basic moral principle. It teaches balance, which is a basic aesthetic principle.

SCIENCE

Science is the study of the physical world, God’s creation. Formerly known as Natural Philosophy, Science is the study of the world of material beings, the world of change and motion, none of which can be approached without a sense of wonder. In Earth Science and Chemistry, students explore the changes of inanimate substances and in Biology they contemplate the mystery of living substances – substances that are endowed by God with the power to move themselves. Then in Physics we take a look at the laws which govern the world

God created. Our approach to Science prepares students for Philosophy and Theology; it leads them from studying changeable substances to studying God, who, though unchanging, is more alive and beautiful than any of His creatures.

FINE & PERFORMING ARTS CURRICULUM

MUSIC

Music appeals to the ear and the mind, the emotions and the intellect, the senses and the spirit. The Church has always considered music an important component of worship. It touches a 'chord' and fills a need beyond what sight and words can achieve alone. Few would deny that music is the most direct path to touching the soul. The power of music with young people is undeniable, and it is imperative that they're able to discern the difference between music that glorifies God and elevates the soul, and that which seeks to alienate us from Him.

Students are exposed to a wide variety of music that they perform chorally in class and at special performances. A music education at St. Michael includes music theory, performance, ear training, note reading, and musical analysis. Music history is taught according to grade level with an emphasis on music development within the Church, and corresponds to the historical period in which the students are immersed.

ART

A complete education must include the development of the student's creative nature and must provide him with the tools and the technique with which to express his ideas, his feelings, and his love. It must also include the analytical skills with which to judge a work of art and therefore must provide continuous exposure to great art. Most importantly, the mechanical skills and the aesthetic aptitude must be put into the proper context of eternal Truth. A good artist is a complete thinker and vice versa.

Chesterton says that in order to be a good artist, one must be a good philosopher: "A man cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything." The influence of the arts in today's society cannot be overstated. This is why the study of, and participation in, the arts is mandatory for full-time students at St. Michael.

DRAMA

Classical drama arose from religious rituals and modern drama has its origins in the staging of the first Christmas play by St. Francis of Assisi. It was the separation of the arts from religion that brought about meaningless art. Great emotion has been spilt upon the ground and down the drain because it is no longer directed to its proper use.

The dramatic arts are particularly powerful in our present culture where movies and the media are often primary sources of knowledge and ideas for young people. It's therefore imperative that students learn as

much as possible about this potent art form. Drama involves the study of how words are brought to life, and in order to successfully do this on stage the actor must understand more than just his character. He must learn to see the work as a whole, to understand the author's vision, and sometimes even the time in which it was written. In other words, the actor must learn to be a good literary critic, a good philosopher, and even a good historian. Skills learned in other classes benefit the students greatly as they pursue excellence in Drama.

OTHER CURRICULAR COMPONENTS

THE SOCRATIC METHOD

St. Michael High School strives to offer a classical curriculum, one that draws on the great Western traditions of faith and reason fruitfully wedded. One critical element of a classical education is the so-called Socratic method of teaching. Many of our teachers use the Socratic method, but what exactly is it?

This approach to education takes its name from Socrates, the great philosopher of ancient Greece. Socrates was both gentle and relentless in his quest for understanding about human nature. He spent his life asking questions of the people around him, not content with simple answers and not satisfied until he clearly understood an issue. Socrates' life was a quest for wisdom, and the Socratic method reflects that quest in the context of the classroom.

In practice, this method proceeds in an interactive fashion through questions and answers. A teacher might ask a class if, for instance, Achilles was a good man or Solomon a good king. Some say yes, some say no. Achilles was a great warrior, some say. Yes, reply others, but he was selfish and arrogant. It becomes necessary to ask a question about goodness. What do we mean by 'good?' Do we mean pious? Or do we mean effective? The answer will dictate the course of the discussion. Initially, the teacher models Socratic behavior, but students learn the technique over time, recognizing points of ambiguity and asking pointed questions aimed at resolving it.

We integrate the Socratic method for three reasons: because it hones each student's oral and analytical skills, it requires students to take ownership of their learning, and it promotes true diversity of thinking in students through rigorous inquiry. The personal perspectives and honest debate that are shared allow students to quickly discover those things that all human beings share, along with those differences that make us all unique creatures of God.

There's more to a Chesterton education than Socratic seminars, but the Socratic method is crucial. Coupled with a healthy dose of integrated lectures and instruction, the Socratic method is an important element of any truly classical education. It can be difficult to teach this way, but we can't hope to produce complete thinkers without it.

INTEGRATED WRITING PROGRAM

Finding one's voice and joining the conversation about humanity's meaning, purpose, and happiness is one of the most important goals of life and of a Chesterton education. That's why the primary skills of reading, thinking, speaking, and writing are an integral focus of the academic program and permeate the curriculum. The strength of the classical model is that the courses work together, not separately, to achieve this goal. This interdisciplinary approach creates a student experience that's engaging, efficient, rewarding, and enjoyable.

This interdisciplinary approach is observable in our writing curriculum. Rather than isolated assignments reflecting varied styles and formats, our writing curriculum offers an integrated, consistent four-year program that builds slowly and deliberately without assumptions, dividing the skill of writing into its component pieces.

To this end, our curriculum adopts the writing program from the Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW), integrating the program across multiple disciplines through all four years. The IEW program follows the rhetorical model of Aristotle and Cicero, allowing for a gradual, thorough curriculum that challenges the advanced student, brings accelerated success to the average writer, and provides remediation for students with emerging skills.

REMOTE LEARNING OPTION

As part of our effort to include students from a wider geographic radius into our St. Michael family, we're offering a 'Zoom' option for certain courses. While we still favor 'in-class learning' as optimal, we recognize the supplemental value of 'remote learning', especially as a means to include students who live too far from SMHS to attend on a daily basis, but who wish to join us for in-person classes and events, as possible.

NOTES ON OUR COHORT SYSTEM

With our relatively small student population, St. Michael uses a 'cohort system' in which we combine 9th & 10th graders into one group, and 11th & 12th graders into another, for instruction in most core classes.

This allows for more robust discussion and efficiency in school operations. In practice, that means for core subjects in Literature, History, Science, Philosophy, and Theology, we offer classes every other year. For example, Ancient Literature may be offered during freshman year for some, while others take it as sophomores. This cohort system is NOT used in Mathematics as each student is placed into the level best suited to them, regardless of their grade.

Finally, as with many things at St. Michael, our cohort system is flexible. Each student as a unique individual and we try to accommodate their educational needs, placing them in optimal classes regardless of grade.

HONORS-LEVEL COURSES

Chesterton core courses are designed and built as 'Honors'-level courses, and this is typically accounted for in 'grade point average' calculation in the college application process. Students who require significant academic accommodation may be regarded as taking particular courses at a standard-level and not at an Honors-level.