



Liberty Common School

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers

Created by the LCS BOD's Parent Education Committee, 05/2020

Why can't my child read whatever he/she wants to read? What's the rationale for the Great Books List?

How many times have you heard someone say, "I don't care what my child eats, as long as he's eating?" Probably never. But change *eat* to *read* and you may have considered this thought yourself. Just as parents desire their children's bodies be filled with nutritious food to support physical growth and mental wellbeing, we wholeheartedly believe a child's mind should be filled with thoughtfully chosen stories from *Great Books* that nudge students toward higher levels, not just in matters of syntax and vocabulary, but in sophistication of plot, character development, conflict and resolution, and the sustained reading of full-length works rather than excerpts. *Great Books* guide students toward *mature literacy*. According to Liberty Common's charter, "*Mature literacy develops as students become acquainted with a broad and rich body of knowledge and become familiar with many well-written, diverse and meaningful works of literature.*" Bon appetit!

Why do we teach Singapore math?

When Liberty set out to build a second-to-none math program, it did not ask which school, which school district, or which state teaches math best. No; it pursued the best math program in the world. This quest acquainted Liberty with the research and conclusions of **Liping Ma** about why Chinese students consistently outperform American students. Ultimately, this led us to Singapore Math. The conceptual strategies of Singapore Math align perfectly with Liberty's philosophy wherein we declare as school policy, "it is not enough to assert something is true; instead teachers (and students) must be able to prove why something is true every step of the way, based on concepts the students already know and understand." This curricular strategy gives our students, in the earliest grades, the firmest advantage of a strong mathematics footing. Stringing together a conceptual approach inherent with Singapore Math, plus skill-based automaticity, plus mastery of the traditional algorithms gives our students a relevant and powerful advantage in college - and for living the good life.

Can you explain Core Knowledge?

The Core Knowledge Sequence defines a complete curriculum which our school has adopted in grades K-8. In the early grades, there is a significant focus on reading development based on the key insight that reading comprehension requires both phonics instruction and lots of rich content knowledge. Created by Dr. E.D. Hirsch, Core Knowledge is designed to expose students to strong, organized content knowledge in history, science, math, English, and the arts. The curriculum is organized in a way to ensure comprehensive coverage of major topics in those disciplines over nine years without duplication or significant gaps. It is also carefully designed to maximize cross-curricular connections within each grade level. For example, students learn about the art and literature of the Renaissance at the same time they learn about the period's history. Students who complete the Core Knowledge Curriculum are set up to succeed in high school as strong readers armed with a broad and deep knowledge base.

Is the dress code really important?

Actually, yes. LCS takes the position that how a student dresses sets the stage for performance and a positive attitude with a focus on learning. A dress code establishes the school as a place of academic dignity. It is important to minimize distractions and perceived student hierarchy. LCS does have "Liberty T-shirt Day" once per month and "Free Dress Day" once per quarter although teachers and staff see a notable difference in behavior on these days. Dressing down has a direct and an undesirable impact on attitudes in school. With a firm yet balanced dress code in place since the school's inception, the overall student attitudes toward respect, punctuality, and focus are more resolute.

Are we a classical school? What is classical education?

At its core, classical education is rooted in nature. It tracks the development of the human mind, from ancient times, in its quest for natural truths defining beauty, goodness, virtue, and perfection – all of which ultimately lead us toward “the good life.” Classical studies present the fullest intellectual approach to more deeply understanding liberal subjects such as science, math, philosophy, computing, literature, art, music, language, history, economics, and physical education. Liberty Common School is classically oriented in its instructional alignment. While allowing for explorations into more contemporary subjects like engineering, the school's overarching academic philosophy is predicated upon acknowledgement and deference to natural law and the understanding of how human nature relates directly to a larger natural order affecting how man behaves, determines what humans need, and ultimately helps predict how man responds in multitudes of situations. It embraces the most elegant expressions of the most refined thoughts of all human history in a consistent effort to perfect the imparting of classical wisdom to philosophical and literary students. The school takes advantage of the great(est) lessons of history, proven by the test of time.

Why don't we teach the cursive handwriting I was taught?

The looped styles learned in the majority of American public schools show rapid deterioration over time. With most students, these looped styles almost always end up developing into an inelegant form of unstructured Italic as students personalize, modify, and simplify their own handwriting as they age. Therefore we begin handwriting instruction with the Italic hand, and give our students the skills they need to develop and improve into their own unique (but legible) penmanship style.

Liberty students need a clean but attractive style of handwriting that will be legible by their teachers as well as themselves. Italic handwriting was one of the first modern handwriting styles to be used for correspondence and it leaves students with a clean, legible hand.

The Getty-Dubay Italic handwriting program uses fewer than forty unique letter forms, print and cursive combined. Also, our Italic lowercase and uppercase letters are more similar to one another than looped styles, making the program easier for boys to learn. Boys are notorious for having bad handwriting because they develop the fine motor skills necessary for cursive much later than girls do. All the Italic letter forms become cursive forms with simple joins and limited embellishment. This way young students, with developing manual dexterity, are able to graduate from print handwriting to cursive handwriting without learning an entirely new set of letters (which is the case with almost all other handwriting programs).

Why do we require Latin?

A solid understanding of Latin words and grammar does wonders when it comes to understanding English grammar and vocabulary. The ability to read critically goes hand in hand with the ability to carefully parse and interpret language. Our brains use Latin to learn to read, write, and speak a more intelligent form of English. Students with two years of Latin training will be prepared to think more clearly, to express themselves more deftly, and to read literature more deeply than their peers who have no Latin grammar and vocabulary.

In addition to supporting the advancement of English, our Latin courses provide historical, cultural, and geographical content. It reinforces the subject areas of history, literature, and civics. It also serves to deepen appreciation of our modern western civilization's roots.

Why so much homework?

Homework is essential to 1) reinforce and deepen the concepts taught in the classroom, 2) develop study skills and habits, and 3) practice skills and knowledge in ways that are not readily accomplished in the classroom. Assignments will be limited to meaningful exercises that prepare students for classroom success. In elementary school parents should expect and plan for ten minutes of homework per night per grade as a guideline. This is in addition to the required reading expectations. In high school the homework load climbs steadily and varies according to the difficulty of one's elective course choices.

Our students take on a challenging, rigorous curriculum. Students need time to work at home. Remember, the hard way through high school is the easy way through college.

Why is character education so important?

Character education is at the heart of the formation of young scholars at LCS. Our Elementary School "Foundation Stones" of respect, responsibility, self-control, perseverance, cooperation, integrity, and citizenship are indeed the foundation of the High School "Capstone" virtues of prudence, temperance, justice, fortitude, gratitude, and patriotism.

We make a conscious effort to teach specific virtues and character traits. These concepts are explained and then illustrated by memorable examples from history, literature, biographies, and case studies. We express a strong belief in the importance of these virtues and encourage them.

These moral tools are required for responsible citizenship and mature leadership within a democratic republic – a system that best thrives on common virtue. Ultimately, our goal is the development and acquisition of wisdom.

Why is it Important for Parents to Volunteer at Liberty?

It is the right and responsibility of parents to educate their children. You have chosen to send your children to a parent-led school. Without parent volunteers, we do not have a school at all. Parents must be involved in every aspect of our school from working in the lunchroom, coordinating events, to our parent-run Board of Directors. Being involved in big and little ways insures not only the success of your students but also the vitality of the school.

As a charter school we receive 80% of what a typical public school in Fort Collins would receive. We are put in the position of doing more with less and bridging the gaps with creative ideas and greater efficiencies. Parents are resourceful, innovative, and vital to our collective success.

Plus, it's just fun.

Note: Please refer to the collection of articles *What Every Liberty Parent Should Know* and the website tab "about us", for more detailed versions of these answers.