



# The Diocese of Birmingham in Alabama Catholic Schools Office

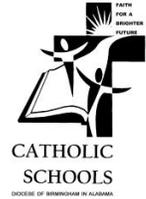


## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>TAB</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>INSTRUCTIONS</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>GRADES</b>	
<b>KINDERGARTEN</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>GRADE ONE</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>GRADE TWO</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>GRADE THREE</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>GRADE FOUR</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>GRADE FIVE</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>GRADE SIX</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>GRADE SEVEN</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>GRADE EIGHT</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>GRADE NINE</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>GRADE TEN</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>GRADE ELEVEN</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>GRADE TWELVE</b>	<b>13</b>



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## Introduction to the Diocese of Birmingham English Language Arts Standards

Pope Benedict XVI, in his address to Catholic Educators in Washington, DC on April 17, 2008, stated that “Catholic schools are an outstanding apostolate of hope... addressing the material, intellectual and spiritual needs of three million children.” He also said “Education is integral to the mission of the Church to proclaim the good news.” The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in their document, *Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium* (2005), said “Our vision is clear: our Catholic schools are a vital part of the teaching mission of the Church...We must respond to challenging times with faith, vision and the will to succeed because the Catholic school’s mission is vital to the future of our young people, our nation, and most especially to the Church.”

*The National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (2012) was created to define the characteristics of Catholic schools and develop performance benchmarks to assist and support all those involved in Catholic education to assess, refine and continue with the Catholic Church’s mission. The Nine Defining Characteristics of a Catholic school are:

1. Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ.
2. Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church.
3. Distinguished by Excellence.
4. Committed to Educate the Whole Child.
5. Steeped in a Catholic Worldview.
6. Sustained by Gospel Witness.
7. Shaped by Communion and Community.
8. Accessible to All Students.
9. Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop.

What do we mean by “Distinguished by Excellence?” “The academic program should be rigorous and doctrinally sound with curricular experiences that are rigorous, relevant, research-based, and infused with Catholic faith and traditions.”(National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools, 2012.) Specifically, our instructional program must prepare students to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with all the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful. Benchmark 7.1 states “The curriculum adheres to appropriate, delineated standards, and is vertically aligned to ensure that every student successfully completes a rigorous and coherent sequence of academic courses based on the standards and rooted in Catholic values. ”

The Diocesan Standards and Benchmarks for English Language Arts were developed by teachers across the Diocese who contributed their expertise to this initiative. I would like to personally thank all those whose knowledge and commitment contributed to this document.

Fran Lawlor  
Superintendent of Schools



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### INSTRUCTIONS

#### NOTES ON THE STANDARDS/STRANDS

1. Reading of informational texts has been added. In the past, greater emphasis was placed on reading literature. Students must develop the skills necessary to comprehend informational text in high school and college as well as in the workplace. However, the study of literature has not been abandoned. Our students will encounter both types of text in their school careers and workplace and must be proficient in reading and understanding each.
2. Today's students must be able to write for multiple purposes- informative/expository, narrative, and persuasive. Tools today not only include the traditional paper and pencil, chalk and blackboard, markers and white board but digital writing on tablets, laptops, and smart phones.
3. The language strand includes the traditional conventions of the English language as well as how these conventions can be applied to writing, speaking, reading and listening. Vocabulary development is considered part of the language strand.
4. The speech and listening strand teaches students to adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks in all subject areas. Students must collaborate for both comprehension and presentation.
5. The increased complexity of text refers to not only what students will know or be able to do but the increasing complexity of the texts required at each grade level.