

# Understanding the Classical School Choice



**Classical School  
Appleton, Wisconsin**

## What Distinguishes Classical School?

Classical School in Appleton, Wisconsin integrates an expertly crafted curriculum, *Core Knowledge®*, with the elements of time-honored classical education and direct instruction methods to deliver a program that is rigorous, rich and thorough. We deliver the curriculum in a disciplined, teacher-led classroom environment where expectations are high for virtuous behavior and studious practices.

The components that make up Classical School are unique to us and differ from neighborhood public schools:

- We teach the **Core Knowledge® Curriculum** (CK) authored by education theorist E.D. Hirsch, professor emeritus of education and humanities at the University of Virginia. The CK Curriculum consists of a specific body of knowledge outlined by Hirsch in science, language arts, world history & geography, visual arts, music and mathematics.
- We use **direct instruction teaching practices** particularly in the areas of reading, spelling, and math at the earlier grade levels.
- We adhere to the **classical education trivium**, a methodology that corresponds to the developmental stages of the learner, and use classical education components such as recitation, memorization, Latin instruction, the study of classic literature, instruction in fallacies of logic, and the use of socratic questioning.
- Students receive **daily instruction in the Spanish language**.

### Understanding the Classical School Program

Classical School was founded as a Core Knowledge® school and has roots in the classical education trivium. The use of “classical” in our school name has proven to be confusing for some people. We are a public charter school established on classical education theory. The school can perhaps be most simply described as a traditional school.

At Classical School, instruction is delivered using the classical education framework defined as three stages of learning—grammar, logic and rhetoric. Classical education is a liberal arts education, with educational philosophy dating back to Plato. It seeks to

develop the “well-trained mind” in contrast to the “well-trained student” by capitalizing on child developmental readiness at different stages of their growth.

In the book *The Well-Educated Mind: A Guide to the Classical Education you Never Had*, author Susan Wise Bauer uses a metaphor from Sixteenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon to describe the theory behind classical education. Bacon, who is often quoted (he is responsible for the statement “Knowledge is Power”), describes learning as a three part process:

- **First, taste: Gain basic knowledge of your subject.**  
Students in the early stages of learning (K-4) have a knack for memorization and a hunger for facts. The retrieval of facts/knowledge satisfies their curiosity. In a sense they are “tasting” the world around them.
- **Second, swallow: Take knowledge into your own understanding.**  
Is it valid? Is it true? Why? Students in this advanced elementary and middle school age are questioning what they know and have a desire for truth. They “swallow” the information to see if it satisfies their hunger for truth.
- **Third, digest: Fold the subject into your own understanding.**  
At this advanced stage, students process what they know, let it change the way they think or reject it as unworthy. They “metabolize” ideas, theories, information and make it part of their being.

Taste, swallow, digest; find out the facts, evaluate them, form your own opinion (Bauer, 18). In this way we illustrate our School of Grammar, School of Logic and a School of Rhetoric which makes up the Classical Trivium.

This is perhaps in opposition to the current trends in education where the goal is to train a student to be “college and career ready.” Classical School believes that by providing a solid base of knowledge, teaching disciplined study skills and, most importantly, properly training the mind to think, a student will acquire the skills needed in any area of college or career interest. It is too often the case that the first two steps of learning, tasting and swallowing, are skipped, progressing directly to an expectation for the child to “digest” the material. This is seen, for example, in elementary texts that insist on asking six-year-olds how they feel about what they are learning, long before they have properly had a chance to learn it. This mental shortcut has become a habit for many

adults, who are ready to give their opinions long before they have had a chance to understand the topic under study. (Bauer, 19)

British author, Dorothy L. Sayers, in a 1940s speech at Oxford, spoke of the loss of classical “tools of learning” in the twentieth century:

*“Has it ever struck you as odd, or unfortunate that today, when the proportion of literacy is higher than it has ever been, people should have become susceptible to the influence of advertisement and mass propaganda to an extent hitherto unheard of and unimagined?...Have you ever, in listening to a debate among adult and presumable responsible people, been fretted by the extraordinary inability of the average debater to speak to the question, or to meet and refute arguments of speaker on the other side?...And when you think of this, and think that most of our public affairs are settled by debates and committees, have you ever felt a certain sinking of the heart?...although we often succeed in teaching our pupils “subjects,” we fail lamentably on the whole in teaching them how to think; they learn everything, except the art of learning?” (Bauer, 19-20)*

\*We encourage you to read her speech in its entirety.\*

[www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html](http://www.gbt.org/text/sayers.html)

For almost two decades, the solid educational base provided by our current K-8 program has proven to produce students who have learned how to learn and who excel at the high school level no matter their socio-economic or cultural background.

### **Clearing up the “Core” Confusion**

Common Core standards should not be confused with *Core Knowledge*® curriculum. The use of “core” in both terms may prove confusing. Core Knowledge is a curriculum, **what should be taught**, whereas core standards refer to **what should be learned** through a specific curriculum.

*Core Knowledge*® was the brainchild of educational theorist E.D. Hirsch who believed academic excellence could only be built on a solid, coherent curriculum. The *Core Knowledge*® curriculum serves as an integral guide that outlines the specific content knowledge, grade by grade, that has formed our culture. The core knowledge idea began as a list at the end of E.D. Hirsch’s 1987 national best seller *Cultural Literacy What Every American Needs to Know* and led to the formation of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

The Core Knowledge Foundation has led a school reform movement that is inspiring educators to teach important content and critical skills coordinated within grade levels, across districts, and with hundreds of other Core Knowledge schools across the country.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is an educational initiative in the United States that details what K–12 students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade. The initiative is sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and seeks to establish consistent educational standards across the states as well as ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit-bearing courses at two- or four-year college programs or to enter the workforce.

While Classical School is governed by its own board and is not held to the Common Core State Standards, *Core Knowledge*® is a curriculum that may be used to meet and exceed the Common Core standards. Classical School has an outstanding record of significantly exceeding state standards on years of standardized state testing as seen on our yearly state sponsored school report cards.

## **Understanding the Classical Trivium at Classical School**

Classical School differs from other public schools in the **philosophy by which students are taught**. The school uses the classical education trivium to determine the point in which students are **developmentally ready to meet expectations**.

Classical School seeks to train the mind through two stages of a three-stage model. Currently, Classical School is a K-8 program. The third stage of the trivium would be training at the high school level.

### **Grammar Stage at Classical School**

#### *Grades K-4*

Classical School utilizes classical education techniques such as recitation, chants, and memorization at the grammar stage--grades K-4. Students' minds are developmental sponges at this level—taking in and being able to memorize many facts. Students discover and order facts. They gain basic, systematic knowledge. At this level of development, students are not yet fully ready to be effective analyzers of these facts and their ability to reason is in its early development. By focusing on the acquisition of

facts and vocabulary, Classical School instruction capitalizes on the developmental strengths of this age group.

Delivered through the teacher-centered practices of direct instruction, recitation, and memorization, students begin their educational journey learning the foundation of reading, math, language, science, history, geography, art and music. Beginning in third grade, students are introduced to classic literature in its' original form and experiment with more advanced steps of the writing process.

### **Logic Stage at Classical School**

#### *Grades 5-8*

Classical School capitalizes on the 5th-8th graders' emerging ability to reason and logically form thought. Lessons are geared towards exercising this emerging ability. Students at this stage are able to draw on their wealth of foundational knowledge, combine it with newly acquired knowledge and logical reasoning to best answer the "why" question.

Students are taught the basics of logic at this stage in order to recognize inconsistencies in thought, fallacies in argument, and establish valid relationships among facts. They discuss and develop a systematic understanding of "why."

It is upon a solid grammar stage foundation from which the 5th-8th grader begins to more fully experience and comprehend classic literature, compose various types of organized pieces of writing, and develop an emerging understanding of world history and scientific principles.

### **Beyond Classical School**

#### *Grades 9-12*

If our program continued to the high school level, students would progress through the Rhetoric phase of the classical education trivium wherein student education would center on applying knowledge and understanding at that level. At this time, our graduates assimilate into the district-wide program utilizing advanced course offerings and the AP and CAPP courses offered at our surrounding high schools.

## **What is my Role as a Parent of a Classical School Student?**

Our success depends greatly on parental support of their students both at home and at school. Classical invites and expects parents to be involved in and supportive of their student's educational journey by:

- providing an environment at home that is conducive to study and completing homework
- understanding the Classical School program
- supporting the school's program you chose
- trusting in the administrative operations of the school
- trusting in the expertise of the teacher
- communicating directly with your child's teacher
- staying current on the operations of our Classical Charter School Association (CCSA) Board
- offering program feedback that is helpful in future administrative policy and CCSA Board decisions
- volunteering hours of service each year to support Classical School operations, programs, and events

Classical School will educate your child, providing a solid foundation that will prepare them for their educational journey beyond our program. We value your trust and thank you for the opportunity to partner with you.

## **Classical School is...**

rigorous  
for anyone  
inclusive  
teacher-led instruction  
disciplined  
focused  
orderly  
using time-honored practices  
focused on student growth  
raising the bar  
committed to the mission  
classic ideals  
art history & artistic elements  
music theory & performance  
fitness & motor skills acquisition  
concerned with virtue  
time conscious  
a safe place to learn  
expectant  
going to give you a great start

## **Classical School is NOT...**

easy or average  
only for gifted students  
elitist  
student-driven or project-based  
lax  
aimless  
chaotic  
going to follow the latest trend  
focused on test scores  
lowering the bar  
apathetic  
pop-culture  
projects without purpose  
songs without intentionality  
games without educational value  
concerned with being popular  
distracted  
unpredictable  
settling for less than your best  
going to let you down