



# FREMONT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

## CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

2019-2020

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Fremont Christian School is committed to providing a progressive, research-supported education for our students. In 2010, we began implementing instructional changes across the curriculum. In grades K-12, the paradigm shift is reflected in education from a system of lecture, isolated study, memorization, and regurgitation to one of high academic expectations, analysis, teamwork, communication, and creativity. As a private school, Fremont Christian School has the latitude to innovate and figure out what works best for our students and implement curricular changes as needed.

One of our goals at FCS is to provide a 21st century education for our students. We work with our students to develop 21st century skills – communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking – that go beyond the content and that they will be able to draw on throughout their schooling and future careers.

At FCS, we know that curriculum is not a textbook, although well-researched, thoughtfully designed textbooks are a great resource for teachers. Curriculum encompasses not only the materials that are used for instruction but also includes the overall plan for instruction, the instructional strategies and practices, the standards, and the underlying philosophies and ethos of the school. Teachers develop curriculum by using textbooks, original documents, magazines, media, non-fiction, fiction, all available resources, strategies, and design skills to create an engaging, challenging environment for every student. What a teacher prepares, presents, and assesses is curriculum. There is freedom for a professional teacher within a professional learning community to investigate research-based methods and materials, innovate, and best serve their students. In fact, our expectation at FCS of ourselves is that every teacher and administrator is him/herself a critical thinker, communicator, collaborator, and creator in the school environment.

In addition to the state content standards, FCS draws from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to inform instruction in all subjects. We are phasing in the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS); California recently adopted the NGSS to replace the previous state science content standards. We are committed to having a standard because that provides for accountability but we are equally committed to always nudging students to the next level, going beyond state or national expectations in grade level content standards. Our students are learning, practicing, and applying the skills of critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity in reading, science, math, history, writing, arts, biblical study, and more while also wrestling with worldview; these are all foundational to becoming a self-reflective member of society.

Instructional practice is the most important part of any curriculum. At FCS, we are committed to best instructional practices that lead to both content knowledge and development of 21st century skills. Teachers (with the exception of performance teachers: music, art, PE, world languages) receive on-going professional development with Project GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Design). This research-based model supports instruction across areas that are rich in content and high level vocabulary, promotes higher level learning and metacognition, encourages gradual release of responsibility, and embodies 21st century learning. GLAD is a powerful instructional model that sets high standards and high expectations for all students and fosters student engagement and learning with understanding across content areas. It is based on brain research, best instructional practices, and “Backwards Design” (Wiggins & McTighe). All elementary teachers provide regular classroom newsletters which include both pictures and text to introduce parents to GLAD strategies at work in the classroom.

The GLAD model emphasizes solving one’s problems, respecting others, and making good choices. Students are expected to explain their thinking (prove it!) and be metacognitive learners. “Metacognition refers to people’s abilities to predict their performances on various tasks and to monitor their current levels of mastery and understanding” (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Metacognitive learners are able to think about their own learning: Does this make sense? How am I doing? What am I doing well? What can I do better?

As a Christian school, we believe in transformative education that not only addresses cognitive development but a child’s spiritual, physical, and civic development. We want to partner with parents to help children achieve their potential as well-rounded individuals. Our elementary and secondary students have been involved in charitable endeavors through Operation Christmas Child, Interact, collecting books for schools in Tanzania, local outreach opportunities as well as other projects providing books, clothing, money, and farm animals to people less fortunate than themselves. We expect the best behavior from our students and try to administer discipline in loving and firm ways that encourage our students to make right decisions. This learning environment that we endeavor to create for our students enables our teaching professionals to engage in an overall curriculum that promotes higher level thinking and lifelong learning.

## Elementary

FCS has adopted a Common Core State Standards (CCSS) based math program that focuses on depth rather than breadth, building conceptual foundations, and most importantly, engagement in the process and application of math concepts. Math Expressions (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) has been designed to reflect the way children learn mathematics. It provides a solid conceptual base that is grounded in over 20 years of research. Students are expected to problem solve, explain their thinking, and prove their answers. Each unit begins with an inquiry-based activity to activate thinking, access prior knowledge, and address preconceptions. Foundational to our mathematics instruction is the understanding that there are multiple paths to solving a problem. Providing a math learning environment that goes beyond memorization, rote learning, and basic computation allows students to learn with understanding which then leads to transference and the ability to apply learning in new situations.

English language arts (ELA) curriculum reflects a workshop framework: students reading and writing across genres, making textual connections, and communicating those ideas in various ways. Students read at their independent reading levels and engage in guided reading at their instructional level. They are expected to respond orally and in writing to the texts they read. This framework provides students with instruction in the many genres of texts, strategies for metacognition, and opportunities to practice these skills. Students set personal goals for becoming better readers and writers; through extensive and close reading, guided reading, conferring and daily writing students actively work toward achieving those goals. This approach emphasizes skill development (phonics, comprehension, text structures, etc.) with a particular focus on vocabulary development (the greatest predictor of academic achievement) and learning the language of workshop.

Social studies and science curriculum are California standards and Next Gen standards-based with GLAD strategies embedded. They are both published by UpLevel. CCSS ELA standards play an integral part in the instruction. Of key importance in the UpLevel curriculum is that students learn how to learn, their learning capacity is increased, and they are able to comprehend new ideas and concepts faster. All elementary students receive a weekly Time for Kids. Teachers use TFK to discuss current events and further extend social studies learning. Field trips, projects, labs, engineering kits, STEAM nights, and other media and materials provide enrichment for these content areas.

Word Study and Grammar help students recognize patterns in the English language to inform their reading and writing. Word Study is very different from the traditional spelling test. Word Study focuses on identifying the spelling and meaning patterns in the English language to learn how to spell and infer meaning of words so that students can transfer this knowledge to previously unknown and unseen words. Grammar is taught within context so that students learn to recognize how grammar changes meaning.

The California CCSS language standards require students to learn to print legibly, and beginning in grade three, write legibly in cursive. We use a D'Nealian Handwriting program (Scott Foresman) that begins with printing and, in later grades, transitions into cursive. D'Nealian printing provides a natural progression into cursive writing. Even in this age of technology, it is important for individuals to be able to handwrite legibly. Dr. William Klemm (2013), a professor of neuroscience at Texas A & M University, describes the many developmental and psychological benefits of learning cursive including sensory-motor coordination, cognitive demand which benefits thinking processes, the engagement of both hemispheres of the brain, and developing tactics for learning in general.

The kindergarten Bible program, Biblical Choices for a New Generation (Standard Publishing), is focused on character building through Old and New Testament stories and learning scripture. Beginning in first grade Building on the Rock, published by Summit Ministries, not only focuses on character development but on understanding the foundations of a Christian worldview through the building of the House of Truth. The content of the curriculum affirms the **metanarrative** of Scripture: (1) God created all things good. At creation, all things were in harmony. (2) At the Fall (Genesis 3), the whole created order fell into disharmony due to the disobedience of man. (3) In the person of Jesus Christ, God began the process of redemption and renewal. (4) In the end, God will restore all things through his Son Jesus Christ.

We believe the biblical metanarrative is manifested in four key relationships of creation. (1) **Fellowship**: The relationship between God and man. God created man for relationship with Himself; that relationship was broken because of sin; that relationship is restored through Jesus Christ. (2) **Image-bearers**: Man was created as whole and healthy being, as an image-bearer of God; sin brought disharmony and conflict into the life and heart of man. Redemption through Jesus Christ begins the healing process within man. (3) **Servanthood**: God created man for harmonious and loving relationships with other people; sin is the cause of disharmony and discord among people; part of restoring mission of Jesus Christ is to bring people back into harmonious relationship with one another. (4) **Stewardship**: God placed the whole created order under the rule and care of His image-bearers (Genesis 1); with the Fall, the relationship between man and the rest of the created order was marred; In Jesus Christ, God continues to call His image-bearers to work to preserve and protect the created order.

In the interest of developing the whole child, all students receive twice weekly instruction in both music (Koda'ly Method) and physical education. Chromebook carts are provided for every grade level and are used to integrate web-based applications into the teaching and learning both in classrooms and at home. In third grade, students learn to play the recorder. Students may then opt to participate in either symphonic band or hand bells beginning in the fourth grade in addition to classroom music. All students in fourth and fifth grades learn to sing chorally and perform at different events during the year.

## Secondary

Fremont Christian School has been actively implementing CCSS ideals since 2010. Changes in text resources and, most importantly, professional development over the years since have focused on making this paradigm shift in order to prepare FCS students for success in higher education and careers of the future. Fremont Christian High School graduation requirements exceed the University of California admission requirements.

FCS has adopted math curriculum that focuses on depth rather than breadth, conceptual foundations, and most important, process and application of mathematical concepts. The CCSS for mathematical practice are reflected in the secondary math courses. Students are expected to explain their thinking, demonstrate their process, understand that there can be multiple paths to the same solution, and make real world applications. Mastery projects allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of math concepts and processes. Three Advanced Placement courses are offered in Mathematics: Statistics, Calculus AB, and Calculus BC.

English courses continue to reflect the CCSS ELA standards through the reading and analysis of key literature of various genres. Students further develop their literacy skills with a continued emphasis on vocabulary development and understanding the role of grammar in conveying the desired meaning. Teachers cultivate clear communication and critical thinking by providing opportunities for students to practice writing for different purposes and audiences. Frequent writing builds stamina, confidence, and skill while encouraging student to engage in thoughtful and meaningful discourse. Honors projects, Honors Sci Fi/Fantasy Literature, and Advanced Placement English Language/Composition also provide opportunities for students to challenge themselves and hone college level reading and writing skills.

California content standards and the NGSS inform content but the CCSS ELA standards play an integral part in the instruction of social studies and science as well. CCSS literacy standards are embedded in content instruction through GLAD instructional strategies. Science instruction takes place in well-equipped labs. The digital Science Expo is a culminating event where students from all science classes design and implement a science project and a written report based on their interests. Advanced Placement courses include: US History, US Government, Biology, and Physics.

Bible courses are a required element of our academically rigorous secondary program and continue with a focus on worldview. Summit Ministries' worldviews curriculum explicitly informs instruction in sixth, eighth, eleventh, and twelfth grade Bible courses. Seventh grade students focus on the Old Testament, ninth grade on the Gospels, and tenth grade on apologetics. Whatever the course, FCS affirms the **metanarrative** of Scripture: (1) God created all things good. At creation, all things were in harmony. (2) At the Fall (Genesis 3), the whole created order fell into disharmony due to the disobedience of man. (3) In the person of Jesus Christ, God began the process of redemption and renewal. (4) In the end, God will restore all things through his Son Jesus Christ.

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Physical education, world languages (Spanish), and a wide variety of fine arts courses (choral music, instrumental music, visual art, and theater arts) round out the curriculum. Advanced Placement courses for electives include Art History, Studio Art 2-D Design, Studio Art Drawing, Spanish Language and Culture, Computer Principles.

In addition to our core academic program, high school students engage in a two week January Term (J-term) during the first two weeks of January: seven days of elective courses culminating in an off-site three-day retreat. High school teachers, administrators, other staff, and sometimes parents, create and implement high interest mini courses that reflect their extracurricular interests and passions. Courses in past J-terms have included offerings such as photography, cooking, badminton, film, science fiction, and many more. Class size is generally limited to 12 students and each student signs up for two classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Internships are another option for interested students during J-term. We have found that in addition to offering diverse and engaging electives outside of the core curriculum, J-term fosters closer relationships between students and between students and staff.

## Final Note

Every year, FCS evaluates its curriculum in regards to appropriateness and rigor, texts and materials, and instructional practices. While there is no perfect curriculum, the materials FCS provides to our faculty are meant as quality tools for providing instruction to our students. As professionals trained to instruct and educate children, teachers make instructional decisions to use the strengths of the materials and supplement the weaknesses to provide the most balanced, research supported, and standards-based instruction to their students. In our continuing effort to improve on and provide an excellent education grounded in a biblical worldview, both the administrative and instructional staff at FCS are committed to best instructional practices and making the changes necessary to achieve this goal.