

Zion Classical Academy

Established by Zion Lutheran Church

Classical Christian Education at Zion Classical Academy of Hastings

What is a Classical Christian Education?

Classical Christian Education is forming what our children love through their joyful discovery of the good, the true, and the beautiful. It was eclipsed as the reigning model of education only about a hundred years ago, after dominating for over a thousand. It has produced some of the greatest minds in history. While the modern method of education specializes in teaching students what to think about separate subjects, the Classical Christian method teaches students how to think, so they can examine everything – math, science, all knowledge – not as disjointed subjects but as an integrated whole, with the Scriptures at the center. Classical schools use children’s God-given strengths at each stage of growth to help them learn (the trivium).

There are three stages of the trivium:

1. **Grammar Stage:** This stage takes place during the lower elementary years. During this stage, the fundamentals of math, science, history, and language arts are emphasized. This lays the groundwork upon which the higher thinking of the later stages can be built. The learning of the Latin language is a key component and begins in the third grade here. Our goal is to teach our students the basic facts of who, what, where, and when, at an age where memorization is generally fun and easy. Learning at this age includes drilling and intense memorization of history lists, parts of speech, multiplication tables, Bible verses, etc. Songs, chants, actions, and other mnemonics are heavily utilized.
2. **Logic Stage:** This stage begins in the upper elementary years. Students take the facts and knowledge they have accumulated and begin to think analytically. Children at this age love to argue, so it is the perfect time to teach them critical thinking and logic. Students are taught how to detect the validity and soundness of arguments, and begin to answer the questions of how and why.
3. **Rhetoric Stage:** This stage begins in junior high. Once the child has learned the data from the Grammar stage and the reasoning of the Logic stage, they are ready to learn to express themselves eloquently and persuasively. This is a time when students begin to have deep philosophical discussions about the world around them. Students are taught how to effectively present their ideas in written and oral form, through coursework and other opportunities such as our extracurricular speech program.

Classical Education teaches students how to live well and virtuously through an emphasis on developing the Fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). Character education is crucial, especially when we are the leading industrialized nation in college drop-outs. According to recent reports from the National Center for Education Statistics, fewer than 40% of students enrolling for the first time at a four-year college end up graduating in four years. With community college students added to the mix, more than half of students who begin college drop out within six years. There are many factors that are responsible for these statistics, but one of the biggest reasons is a lack of character education in our schools today. According to American physician and psychologist, Leonard Sax:

“What characteristic, measured in childhood, best predicts health, wealth, and happiness in that individual 20 years down the road, when the child is an adult? Is it intelligence? Grades in school? Ability to make friends? No. It is none of these things. Longitudinal cohort studies consistently find that **self-control** in childhood best predicts health, wealth, and happiness in adulthood, far better than IQ scores, grades in school, friendliness or popularity.” (2018).

Furthermore, 47% of jobs will vanish in the next 25 years (say Oxford University researchers) and 85% of jobs that will exist in 2030 haven’t been invented yet (according to a 2017 report from Dell Technologies). Therefore, it is vitally important to give our children the skills to be employable in any career field. Self-control and virtue should be among the top priorities for parents and schools because character matters just as much or more than academic achievement. The goal of a classical education is about much more than just preparing students for the “college and career readiness” standards of the Common Core – it is about harkening back to the basics of our Western heritage and educating the whole person. If the ultimate goal of an education is merely for students to be able get into the right college so that they

can land the right job in order to make as much money as possible, then we have completely lost sight of our humanity and what really determines a person's value in this world. Our Founding Fathers (particularly Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson) wrote extensively about education, and both of them stated that the fundamental aim of education is happiness.

Some examples of this include having our students sweep the floors and wipe the tables at lunch time, or by having our older students take on the responsibility of being mentors to our younger students. Every week, we have our older students visit our preschool classrooms and read books to them. We also have assigned chapel families, where our older students sit with our younger students and encourage model behaviors. Two different students are tasked with raising and lowering our flags on our flagpole outside each day. Our students are also responsible for stating the daily announcements and prayers over our intercom each morning. Additionally, all of our students recite the Pledge of Allegiance, as well as the Pledge to the Christian Flag together at the start of every day.

What does this method of education look like in the classroom?

Classical Christian schools teach all subjects based on the principle that God is the Creator of all that exists. Wisdom and virtue are taught through the study of the liberal arts (the verbal arts of the trivium – grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the mathematical arts of the quadrivium – arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). The Socratic method is often employed during the logic and rhetoric stages of learning. The memorization and recitation of weekly Bible verses begins in kindergarten. We teach a phonics-based reading curriculum that aims at building knowledge and content, rather than using the skills-centered approach of the Common Core standards.

The classical method prides itself on using the Great Books that have stood the test of time (instead of popular current works) as the backbone of the entire course of study. Whenever possible, original sources of literature are used instead of textbooks. Our curriculum uses Classical literature to teach writing, spelling, grammar, and speech. We are also careful to include fiction and historical literature that allows children to become intimately acquainted with men and women of outstanding character.

Instead of adhering to the latest educational fads, we teach traditional math and English composition. Our students engage in core science with rigor, and with an emphasis on understanding the “why” by extensive use of the scientific method. Our science curriculum is Christian-based. Rather than sheltering students from the theories of important non-believing thinkers, this type of education seeks to equip students with the knowledge they need to navigate today's world, based on the claim that all truth is God's truth.

A major difference between a classical education and a progressive one is how history is approached. Many schools today label history as a subcategory of “social studies”, which also encompasses sociology, economics, political science, psychology, anthropology, archeology, etc. Instead of using a limited, modern interpretation of history, classical courses are taught chronologically and systematically so that students understand history as a coherent story. The history, literature, theology, and philosophy curriculums are interwoven and aligned in a classical curriculum. Classical schools believe that the Bible created the soul of Western Civilization, so the stories of the Bible are integrated with the important events and timeline of World History so that students understand the congruent nature of our origins. Significant time is also spent studying our nation's Founding Fathers and our Christian heritage. We follow Hillsdale College's curricular model to ensure a devotion to civil and religious liberty, and conviction that the Biblical and classical virtues are necessary in the formation of the American citizen. There is a strong focus on peoples' constitutional rights and civil duties.

Our school dedicates substantial time to music, art, and P.E. classes because we believe they teach humanity, a richer understanding of culture, and important character traits that can only be learned through those subjects. Technology is used as a tool, rather than as the focus of our studies. Our goal is to educate students on usage of computers through typing skills, safe internet practices, and responsible technology interactions.

The study of the Latin language is a key component of the Classical model of education, and begins in third grade here. Since up to 65% of the English language is rooted in Latin, studying this language gives a student a superior understanding of English grammar and vocabulary. Latin is also the root language of medicine, science, logic, theology, and law so an in-depth comprehension leads to better overall grades and standardized test scores. Understanding Latin also greatly aids in the learning other languages, especially the romance languages (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.).

All of our subjects are interwoven and we are intentional about keeping each classroom's lessons and themes in sync so that students gain deeper knowledge of subjects through cross-referencing and unification. Learning is celebrated as a lifelong gift. Our rigorous academics inspire students to work harder and strive towards excellence, especially since a Classical Education seeks to motivate students to figure out their purpose in life while exploring the big "why's" of our existence. Instead of mimicking the design of a traditional public school with the addition of a chapel and Bible class, a Classical Christian school seeks to penetrate the faith more deeply into the educational model. We at Zion strive to offer an education that is more thoroughly Christian.