



CLASSICAL

CHARTER SCHOOLS

CLASSICAL CHARTER SCHOOLS LATIN INSTRUCTION

Some Context

Classical Charter Schools opened in August 2006 as a high-performing charter school serving Kindergarten to eighth grade students. We offer a classical curriculum in a highly structured setting aimed at giving scholars the chance to develop as free-thinking individuals and citizens of impeccable character who are ready to excel at college-preparatory high schools.

Probably no aspect of the school garners more interest and discussion than our “classical” curriculum. As our scholars grow and excel, and as fundamentals are increasingly mastered, we begin to teach more of the classical aspects of education. The first and most notable is Latin instruction, starting in third grade. Other aspects of the classical nature of our school include debate instruction, starting in fourth grade, and Character Education, taught in all grades on a weekly basis.

Why Latin?

Latin becomes a supporting part of CCS’s academic program when scholars enter third grade. Latin instruction is taught in units that alternate with Social Studies and Science classes in third grade and with Debate class in fourth grade; the lessons range from 30-45 minutes daily. There are many reasons for promoting Latin in elementary schools. One is to promote vocabulary acquisition: 90% of English words over two syllables are derived from Latin. Also, Latin prefixes and suffixes add color and precision to the English language and abounds in the medical, scientific, and technical fields.

Interestingly, facilitating English vocabulary acquisition, initially seen as the main benefit of Latin instruction, has been eclipsed by its ability to facilitate English grammar instruction. Most children learn the basics of language in their day-to-day activities as a child. As a school with a population of 16% ELL students, Latin provides a real advantage to our English Language Learners. In particular, the connection that our Spanish-speaking scholars make, even at 8 years of age, between Spanish and Latin clearly demonstrates the advantage of bilingualism.

Latin instruction also serves scholars by providing a means to approach and experience a vast historical context. Latin curricula often feature stories set in the outer reaches of the Roman Empire. Students experience life in Roman Egypt, Spain, Gaul, or Germany, and learn how these cultures interacted with the mainstream culture of Roman Italy. Their removal from the world of today allows students to rethink social questions and human dilemmas, and to consider cultural issues and ethnic differences from a new perspective.

Our Approach

Our program is unique for many reasons. We teach Latin as a regular course far younger than many schools, whether private, charter, or public. We also do not have a separate Latin teacher for grades 3-5, but instead ask our elementary classroom teachers to teach the language. As such, we have developed a proprietary curriculum able to adapt to our unique needs and challenges. This means we adjust how we teach Latin to work within time constraints, teacher experience, and scholars' incoming skills and knowledge.

In our third through fifth grades, we teach a self-created curriculum that draws upon *Minimus* and *Latin for Beginners*. *Minimus*, published by Cambridge University Press, uses classical pronunciation and a non-sectarian pedagogical approach, with teacher-led lessons. The focuses in *Minimus* are vocabulary acquisition and Roman culture for background. With both books, our scholars learn vocabulary and sentence patterns not by rote memorization, but by seeing key words and phrases repeated frequently in the stories and exercises, often illustrated with diagrams or pictures. CCS scholars particularly like the cultural and historical lessons in both texts, as they provide a much-needed alternative perspective to learning history and allow our scholars to learn about a culture that is highly foreign yet intriguingly familiar.

In our third grade, scholars can translate simple sentences (e.g., *Magistra docet discipulos*) and obtain nearly 100% mastery in translating the 60 most common Latin words. By fourth grade, our scholars delve into Roman family life, education, work life, clothing, and military, and learn to translate another 60 words. In fifth grade, our curriculum weaves in introductory grammar, conjugation, yet another 60 Latin words, and Roman history. By the end of fifth grade, our scholars can translate basic English sentences such as "Suddenly I got hungry and ate bread and fruit" into the Latin *inopinate esuriens panem malaque comedi*.

Our Middle School Latin program has been reworked in 2020 to prioritize scholar opportunity for future success in languages, whether it be continuing Latin in High School or studies in French, Spanish, or Italian. In sixth grade, scholars learn the basics of mythology, learning about myths involving Zeus and Hera and the purpose behind Rome's belief in the gods and goddesses. Scholars also learn foundational grammar to set them up for success in seventh grade Latin where they will study for their first "National Latin Exam (NLE)," which offers real credits and credentials for them to utilize in High School.

Seventh and eighth grade Latin are the "capstone years" of Latin at CCS where they will learn how to express past tense verbs, formulate their own sentences, learn how Rome was founded, and examine philosophical and ideological undertones that Rome operated upon. They will learn to critically evaluate Roman society and even to translate base-level real Latin excerpts starting at the end of seventh grade.

In eighth grade, our scholars not only take the "second level" of the NLE (the Beginning Latin 1 Exam), but they also make a trip to Italy for a full week, visiting Florence, Venice, Pompeii, and of course, Rome. Our scholars have an opportunity to experience the very sights and places they have studied for nearly a decade, culminating in a visual representation of Rome's influence upon Western education.

Evaluating the Program

How do we evaluate the program's success? Latin quizzes and tests are used to assess scholar learning in comparison to the state's standards for languages other than English. Thus far, our scholars are learning Latin very well, meeting and exceeding the state standards based on our own assessments.

Additionally, we look to the external NLE to guide our evaluation of our Latin program. In 2022, both our seventh and eighth grade scholars scored only 6 points shy of the national average on the Intro NLE (24/40) and the Beginning NLE (21/40) respectively. We also celebrated several of our scholars, 19 seventh graders and 6 eighth graders, who earned awards for this exam.

Latin instruction at CCS is both a feature of and means to preparing our scholars to excel in their continued education. By emphasizing vocabulary and grammatical instruction, in addition to cultural and historical learning, Latin represents a critical component of the effort to develop free-thinking citizens of impeccable character— the Classical scholar.