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## WORLD Magazine | Fleeing Common Core and into the arms of Classical Education

Russ Pulliam | Oct. 16, 2013

INDIANAPOLIS—Designed to boost academic standards nationally, Common Core has fired up fierce political debates in Indiana and other states.

Critics on the right object to the federal government dictating standards to the states. Critics on the left see Common Core as a business-driven plot to force conformity on students.

In Indiana state officials have paused Common Core in order to hold hearings on it for a year.

Meanwhile, in Central Indiana, a flight from Common Core is driving some families to the even higher challenge of classical education.

Classical programs are growing their numbers, but they are not for everyone. Latin starts in the early elementary grades. Students read the classics, often above traditional grade level expectations. They memorize classical documents such as the Declaration of Independence or the Magna Carta. They learn states and capitals. They memorize multiplication tables and drill hard in math.

Consider these impressive classical school enrollment gains. The Oaks Academy in Indianapolis has gone from 475 to 564 students at two campuses. The Highlands Latin School in Carmel, Ind., has jumped from 100 to 150 students, in just its third year. Classical Conversations, a one-day-a-week program for homeschool families, grew from 605 to 715 students across Indiana this fall. A smaller Roman Catholic school in Indianapolis, Lumen Christi, grew from 85 to 93 student this fall.

Not all families who embrace the classical model are running from Common Core. But Common Core seems to represent an experimental, risky approach for families who want a longer track record.

Valerie Swack and her husband left the Zionsville, Ind., schools for Highlands in response to skepticism about Common Core. "I don't want my children to be in a test group that may not work," said Swack, who has an MBA from DePaul University. "Nobody knows what the tests will be."

"The experimental approaches, like the lattice method for simple multiplication in second grade math, really puzzled me," she added. "We wanted something that was drill, drill, drill, and then move to the next level. Math is too important to be changing the method every four to five years."

Swack also wondered about the lack of pilot testing of Common Core, compared to the time-tested classical approach. “Classical education teaches great critical thinking,” she said. “In the early years you drill in the facts. Then in the later years you have a body of material that you draw upon for critical thinking skills.”

Steve and Krista Broderick also pulled their children out of Catholic archdiocese schools, which have embraced Common Core, in favor of a classical approach. “We’re very concerned with the lowering of the math and language standards,” Steve Broderick said.

Classical schools use word of mouth as their marketing strategy. Administrators prefer to avoid the Common Core debate. “We’re confident that when we’re measured by any standard, our students will do well,” said The Oaks Academy head of school Andrew Hart. “Classical education has worked well for thousands of years.”

Indiana state Rep. Rhonda Rhoads, a retired teacher, has been a critic of Common Core and authored legislation in the state’s General Assembly to pause Indiana’s planned implementation of Common Core for a year. She complained at a recent hearing: “It seems to be there is no rock that our states or families who want to get away from Common Core can crawl under to get away from this.”

Classical schools might be growing into that alternative, based on enrollment trends in Indiana. The critics and the advocates of Common Core might even find some silver lining here. To escape it, some families are fleeing to the much more rigorous territory of classical education.