



SECONDARY SCHOOL CHANGES

2020-2021 School Year

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

On Thursday, June 25, 2020, Latham Christian Academy announced changes to our secondary school program for Grades 7-12. In addition to the recording of the parent program available on YouTube, the school is providing the following questions and answers for families interested in the changes.

Please feel free to contact Mr. Fry at school (bfry@lcany.org or 518-785-5916) with any additional questions. As a school board and administrative team, we want to be sure our parents are as comfortable with these changes as we are. We are confident that our new program will provide an even better Christian educational product to what we have done in the past and desire to share the specifics with our families.

WHAT CHANGES ARE YOU MAKING?

Starting in September 2020, LCA will shift from relying primarily on A Beka Book and Bob Jones University Press curriculum to the Alpha-Omega Ignitia curriculum. Along with this change is a shift from a lockstep graded classroom-based model to a multi-graded mastery-based individualized education model.

WHY ARE YOU MAKING THESE CHANGES?

Simply put, we feel that this new model is best for our students. God used the COVID-19 pandemic and related changes in education itself and the retirement of some staff members to help us all see the need for this change. For a variety of reasons, our enrollment has dropped, and we also see this factor as God's leading toward this change.

WHAT GRADES ARE AFFECTED BY THIS CHANGE?

LCA's secondary program of Grades 7 through 12 will shift to this new program. Grades K3 through 6 will continue in our regular classroom-based instructional model.

WHAT IS IGNITIA?

Ignitia is a web-based, blended learning, collaborative, interactive curriculum that provides cutting-edge instruction filtered through a Christian worldview. It is a highly respected individualized program used by Christian schools around the world.

IS IGNITIA SOME NEW CURRICULUM OR A FAD IN EDUCATION?

No. Alpha-Omega began producing "Lifepacs," written mastery-based individualized curriculum, in the 1970s. This curriculum was repackaged as the digital Switched-On Schoolhouse in the 1990s and evolved into Ignitia in 2010. LCA has been using Ignitia in part since 2011.

WHY INDIVIDUALIZED CURRICULUM?

The simplest answer to this is that we at LCA believe that the Bible teaches that God created man with a unique purpose for every individual. We believe that the Bible teaches the individuality of each person and the priesthood of the believer. We believe in the importance and accountability of each individual on a personal basis toward God. We see an individualized curriculum for secondary students as the best way to "flesh out" these biblical philosophical beliefs.

WHAT ARE OTHER SCHOOLS AND EDUCATORS SAYING?

Although we believe it is not a fad, we are seeing a trend in leading educational circles returning to historical individualized learning. In contemporary educational jargon, this is sometimes called differentiated instruction, which refers to far more than just what we used to call special education. Wikipedia says, "Delivery of instruction in the past often followed a 'one size fits all' approach. In contrast, differentiation is individually student centered, with a focus on appropriate instructional and assessment tools that are fair, flexible, challenging, and engage students in the curriculum in meaningful ways." Parents are encouraged to research this trend on their own. At LCA, we feel that this trend actually reflects a traditional perennialist or essentialist educational philosophy, one based on biblical truth.

WHAT ARE THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION?

Of course, following biblical principles has many real-world benefits. For example, students can receive immediate feedback and intervention from the classroom teacher based on their mastery of a lesson. Teachers can more easily set achievement standards and require students to meet those standards before moving on to other material. Students can re-learn material until they master it without slowing down or frustrating other students and can move more quickly once they master material without feeling frustrated by their classmates.

WHAT DOES MASTERY-BASED EDUCATION MEAN?

The opposite of mastery-based instruction is really lockstep instruction. Instead of moving students along as dictated by a scope and sequence based on the performance of the average student and on the school calendar, students move on only when they have sufficiently mastered that material themselves. Checkpoints are placed at the lesson level, the project level, the quiz level, and the unit test level to ensure this mastery. At any point, the teacher and student can partner together to increase the student's understanding and mastery of the assigned work.

WHO WILL BE LEADING THIS PROGRAM AT LCA?

Mrs. Elise Mansfield, a professional educator with three years' experience in the conventional classroom environment and thirteen years as a student in an individualized program, will be the lead teacher in the secondary classroom. Mr. Bryan Fry, the school's administrator with twenty-three years of education experience and eleven years as a student himself in an individualized program, will continue his role as high school principal and work closely with the Ignitia program at LCA.

WHAT RESULTS TO YOU EXPECT FROM THIS CHANGE?

While only time will completely reveal the results of a change to an online mastery-based individualized curriculum like Ignitia at LCA, we can look at the results other schools have seen. A study done in December 2018 revealed that 68% of students surveyed from schools using the Ignitia curriculum saw an improvement in their coursework and 29% stayed about the same when their schools changed to Ignitia. In addition, 44% saw improved standardized test results with 53% staying about the same. Results always depend on the specific implementation, of course, but we expect to see an improvement in our students' achievement once we complete this change. By the way, we are also confidently expecting to see other, less tangible, benefits such as more of a unified team approach to learning as students are able to encourage younger students and learn from older ones in the same room and work together to master their material.

IS IGNITIA DESIGNED FOR THIS USE?

Yes! Ignitia was designed from the ground up by trained and experienced master teachers to be used as an individualized online Christian school curriculum under the direction of qualified professional educators. It is only available to Christian schools, not directly to home school families. The way we are implementing the

Ignitia program starting in 2020 follows the design of the program better than the way we have used it in the past.

WHAT WILL A STUDENT'S DAY BE LIKE?

Each student will be assigned his own workspace in an "office" in a large classroom. While we are still putting together the exact size of this office, we expect each one to be at least 4 feet wide and offer plenty of space for a computer monitor, keyboard, and mouse as well as personal decorations and work area. Students will work with their lead teacher to set goals for the day based on their capabilities and on the schedule created by the Ignitia system. Students will work for 45 to 50 minutes at a time after which a break time will be provided, often about 15 minutes outside or in our school gym. (Some of this schedule will be based on New York State guidelines for COVID-19 prevention, once they are released.) Some classes will still be offered in conventional classroom-based instruction at an assigned time during the day. We still plan to offer athletics and extra-curricular activities, based on enrollment, demand, and COVID-19 restrictions.

WHAT ABOUT HOMEWORK?

Because students can work at their own pace and do not need to stop working when another student has a question, we believe most students will have much less homework this year than in past years. Near the end of the school day, the lead teacher will check on each student's goals for the day. Most goals not completed during the school day will be expected to be completed at home prior to the next school day. Parents should have a tablet, laptop, or desktop computer available with Internet access for the students to be able to complete homework. Most classes will also require projects to be completed from time to time, and these projects may need to be done inside or outside the home. Having less homework does not mean a lower quality of education, but it does mean that families can treasure their limited time together more without having to worry about completing schoolwork.

WHAT ABOUT EXCEPTIONAL LEARNERS?

Individualized curricula are generally the perfect solution for students who either do not feel challenged by conventional classroom curriculum or struggle to stay with their classmates in the classroom. Ignitia is no exception. Because this curriculum is tailored for each student's strengths and weaknesses, each student can see a greater success. Whether we choose a label like ADD, ADHD, autistic, or gifted and talented for a particular child, we also know that, even though fallen, God created this child in His image to accomplish His will for His glory. Ignitia will almost certainly help all of them, even including those with physical challenges. Contact LCA for more information on how we will come alongside the parents to see God's best in the lives of each child.

WHAT ELECTIVES WILL BE AVAILABLE NEXT YEAR?

LCA will now have an extensive catalog of elective classes available to our students in addition to the core academic classes. Students and their parents can choose from AP classes, career and technical education classes, secondary electives, and standardized test preparation classes. For a full class list, please contact Mr. Fry or see the Ignitia website at <https://www.aopschools.com/curriculum/ignitia/>.

HOW CAN MY CHILD GET HELP IN ADVANCED OR SPECIALIZED CLASSES?

We plan to hire at least two part-time educators to assist students in challenging academic areas. If an LCA student desires to take a more advanced course or a specialized class for which we cannot provide an experienced educator, we still have options. For example, Alpha-Omega provides a program called AOA Alliance in which our students can partner (for an additional cost) with a professional educator at the program's flagship school in Iowa. We have used this program in the past here at LCA for several advanced classes and seen success in it. Mr. Fry can answer additional questions about this program or about other options to see a student's success in an advanced or specialized class.

IS THE INTERNET ACCESS SAFE FOR YOUR STUDENTS?

As in past years, LCA provides the latest in robust secure web filtering to make it very difficult for students to access unacceptable and immoral websites and internet content. All devices brought to school must connect to our school's filtered WiFi. Because no system can be 100% secure, our staff will ensure that we maintain a close supervision of all devices, and students may only use their personal cell phones with prior permission from a staff member. Please contact Mr. Fry with any questions or concerns about the internet security devices in place. Alpha-Omega Ignitia secures its own content well on secure servers only accessible to credentialed employees and our own administration, faculty, students, and parents here.

WHAT ARE YOUR LONG-TERM GOALS?

Our administrative team here at LCA, including our pastor, administrators, and school board, desire to see our school provide the best academic education possible. The Bible teaches that both knowledge and wisdom (the practical application of knowledge) begin with the fear of the Lord. Without following biblical principles as a foundation, no true education can ever occur, regardless of the curriculum or methods. Our leadership will continue evaluating all of our curriculum and methods based on Scripture and on the provision and leading of the Lord. We always want to be able to say confidently that we are following the leading of the Holy Spirit in our Christian school. It is our plan to use Ignitia supplemented by conventional classroom instruction for our secondary school in the years to come.

I AM CONCERNED THAT MY CHILD WON'T RECEIVE A HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION NOW!

We will all miss the teachers and staff members leaving LCA in 2020. We also know that familiarity provides a certain level of comfort and any time we venture into unfamiliar areas, some of that comfort is lost. Mrs. Mansfield and Mr. Fry desire to work regularly with each family to ensure we all make a smooth transition to this new style of learning—new at some level to everyone involved. Based on our research we are prayerfully confident that our families will see specific benefits to this change even before school ends in June 2021.

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT IGNITIA?

Take a look at the following websites for more information:

- *Alpha-Omega Ignitia - <https://www.aopschools.com/curriculum/ignitia/>*
- *Alpha-Omega Academy (the flagship school using the Ignitia curriculum) - <https://www.aoademy.com/>*
- *Monterey Bay Christian School (CA) – An example of a school using the Ignitia curriculum - <https://mbcsonline.org>*

LCA plans to continue producing and distributing information on this new program throughout Summer 2020, including an upcoming special section on our webpage with full details.

If you have more questions, please contact us. We are eager to explain both the changes we plan to make as well as the reasons behind those changes. We sincerely hope you will partner with us for the Christian education of your child.