



# Foundational Statements

## Mission

The Alberta Classical Academy (ACA) exists to promote and advance classical liberal arts education in Alberta through the administration of public, tuition-free charter schools.

Classical education is distinct from the dominant mode of education currently offered in Alberta public schools:

- Contrary to the dominant ethos of value subjectivity and non-judgement, classical education is rooted in an objective standard of truth, beauty, and goodness, and aims to orient pupils toward these ideals.
- Whereas most education programs are narrowly focused on career readiness, a classical education aims to cultivate virtue, wonder, and a love of wisdom. It is an emancipatory undertaking, not a utilitarian one.
- Classical education aims to preserve, transmit, and build upon the wisdom of past generations — not to repudiate or dismantle it.
- Instead of teaching abstract “skills” divorced from knowledge, classical education embraces an overarching structure (the “trivium”) comprising grammar, logic/dialectic, and rhetoric.
- Classical education is rich in content and highly integrated across grade levels and disciplines. It aims to produce a coherent understanding of our world.

Classical education is not innovative per se. It represents, rather, a rediscovery of time-tested classical methods and eternal aspirations.

## Purpose

To deliver a classical liberal arts education that equips students with the virtues, knowledge, and habits befitting free citizens.

## Vision

To educate well cultivated men and women who seek to live in accord with wisdom and virtue, who are equipped to contribute to the authentic common good of their communities, recognizing the perennial reality of truth, goodness, and beauty as the guiding light of human affairs.

## Philosophy

Our philosophy begins with the assertion that truth, beauty, and goodness exist as objective qualities, impervious to time or human opinion. Knowledge of these is what constitutes wisdom.

The pursuit of wisdom is a life-long endeavour. It begins with the experience of philosophical wonder, is nurtured through exposure to great ideas and beautiful works of art, is practiced through free inquiry and disciplined study, and is sustained through a love of truth.

The program we intend to offer centers on enduring and beautiful works of art, literature, science, and philosophy from around the world: from Euclid, to Homer, Aristotle to al-Farabi, Sophocles to Shakespeare, Laozi, Li Bai, and much more. We study the classics because they speak to eternal and universal aspects of the human condition, and relate to questions of ultimate concern: why are we here, and what should we desire? What is the nature of justice? What do we owe others? What is the difference between liberty and license, and how can we order our lives well? By engaging with classical works, students acquire the ability to inhabit diverse perspectives. They become historically and culturally literate, break free of the narrow and parochial prejudices of their own era, and learn to think deeply about life's most fundamental questions.

We believe that society is an intergenerational project, with each generation owing debts to those who came before, and to those who will follow in time. Our obligation to students is to ensure they can enjoy "the best that has been thought and said," and to give them opportunities to partake of the great soul-enriching conversations that have spanned millennia. In turn, students will be prepared to pass along and to build on that inheritance, with gratitude and humility.

The Alberta Classical Academy offers an academically rigorous program that will prepare students for further study and, eventually, for participation in a modern workforce. Yet the true purpose of education is not limited to making students narrowly useful or equipping them for material success. Recalling the Chinese sage Confucius, we hold that "an educated person is not a tool." Children are not merely future workers. They are future friends, spouses, neighbours, parents, and citizens. They are bearers of souls, which thirst after knowledge of what is true, good, and beautiful. A classical education prepares students not only to live, but to live virtuously and with purpose.

## Guiding Principles

- ❖ We believe that truth exists, and we are committed to seeking it diligently and courageously. This commitment is expressed through a culture that values open and civil conversation, free inquiry, and intellectual humility, and that encourages a sense of philosophical wonder.
- ❖ With Plato, we hold that the pursuit of truth is entwined with the practice of virtue. Where there is truth, there is goodness and beauty. Knowledge of them is what constitutes wisdom.
- ❖ The highest aspiration of education is to foster moral excellence. Our goal is to help students cultivate the mind and the heart, impart a love of virtue, and form the habits of temperance and self-mastery that will enable them to live good, healthy, and purposeful lives.
- ❖ We recognize that we are the temporary guardians of a rich civilizational inheritance, and from that comes a duty to transmit to the next generation the best that has been thought and written. Students likewise have a right to enjoy that inheritance, and to be ennobled and uplifted through encounters with great and beautiful works of the past. By ensuring that learners are conversant with those who came before us, we allow them to benefit from the unearned wisdom of the generations.
- ❖ We believe that liberal education is not principally a utilitarian undertaking, but an emancipatory one: It equips students with the virtues and habits that make people free in a true sense. Our academically rigorous program will

prepare students well for further studies and give them the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in the workforce. Yet these are not the primary ends of education. They are, rather, a happy by-product.

- ❖ All persons are bearers of divine souls that each of us possesses with an inviolable dignity, irrespective of race, sex, creed, or ability.
- ❖ Education should be pursued in a spirit of friendship and leisure—*scholē*, in Greek. Learning that is forced, or that is not accompanied by a sense of wonder and joy, is unlikely to take root. Effective formation of the human personality requires space for contemplation and thought, away from distraction and material exigencies.
- ❖ Students thrive in an environment that provides stability, order, belonging, and love. We understand that structure and high expectations are not incompatible with the spirit of leisure or the pursuit of freedom, but a precondition for them. Through immersion in a well-ordered environment, pupils can learn to order their own souls well.
- ❖ Teachers are leaders in the classroom and in the school community at large. They impart knowledge and expertise to students, model good conduct, encourage respectful dialogue and inquiry, and create and uphold the school's culture.

## Essential Virtues

Students at Alberta Classical Academy schools will develop an expansive moral vocabulary. They will learn to recognize and identify a variety of virtues, understand their varied manifestations, and use them as reminders of what is good and noble. Students will strive to embody these virtues in their own lives, both through habitual practice, and through active self-reflection.

Aristotle provides an important definition of virtue that inspires our educational mission:

*Virtue is an active condition that makes one apt at choosing, consisting in a mean condition in relation to us, which is determined by a proportion and by the means by which a person with practical judgement would determine it (Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, II.6)*

According to Aristotle, as well as other classical thinkers of other traditions such as Confucius, virtue is much more than rule-following. It consists in the development of intellectual and moral character whereby students develop the habits and intentions of making good moral decisions based upon clear-sighted reasoning and well-managed passions and desires. This is often done in the form of choosing the “mean” between two opposing extremes (e.g., courage as the “mean” between rashness and cowardice). Habitual practice, dedication to learning, and self-cultivation develops the active habits of virtue and judgment. The life of virtue is key to the happy life in freedom and friendship.

Among the core virtues and moral qualities that we aim to impart are the following:

**Benevolence:** *kindness, friendship, charity, a concern for the wellbeing of others, and a willingness to give of oneself.* It is the opposite of malevolence or acting badly towards others. In many classical traditions (i.e., Chinese, Western), it is the highest virtue or the completion of all the virtues. Confucius call it *ren* (仁), and the ancient Greek and Roman thinkers regarded friendship (*philia*) as the highest attainment of human excellence.

**Courage:** *the active condition by which one chooses to endure great difficulties and frightening things for the sake of what is right.* Courage is not the lack of fear but is the capacity to keep it in proportion and not be ruled by it (Aristotle, *Nic Ethics*, III.8). According to C. S. Lewis, courage is “the form of every virtue at its testing point.”

Discernment: *clear-sightedness, sharp-perception, and sound judgment; the disciplined application of reason.*

Discernment is what allows us to distinguish the correct course of action, and to tell the difference between right and wrong, just and unjust, beauty and ugliness.

Diligence: *the solicitude and love we bring to the pursuit of excellence; the opposite of negligence.* Derived from one of the Latin words for loving (*diligere*), it is woven into the pursuit of every virtue, as the pursuit of excellence is continual.

Eutrapelia, or charm: *the active condition of being a convivial companion, who exhibits a spirit of ease, delight, and good humour* (Aristotle, *Nic Ethics*, IV.8). It is a mean between buffoonery and boorishness. It reminds us that the excellence of our humanity consists in conversing and sharing our lives together in friendship.

Forbearance: *a capacity to endure life's trials with grace, patience, and fortitude.* Forbearance is related to other virtues, such as tolerance, perseverance, temperance, and even faith. It can be manifest as the ability to maintain an inner tranquility and resolve, despite challenging outward conditions.

Humility: *understanding one's limitations.* Humility is a mean between hubris/arrogance and pusillanimity (thinking too lowly of one's self). It is the precondition for growing in wisdom, and it leads us to approach the world with reverence and gratitude.

Integrity: *the condition of being a whole and complete human being on account of one's devotion to wisdom and righteousness.* This sense of wholeness leads one to regard falling away from wisdom and righteousness not simply as error, but as a corruption and dissolution of one's very humanity and sense of personhood. Integrity inspires forthrightness, simplicity, honesty, trustworthiness, and the courage to stand by one's convictions.

Justice: *"the perpetual and constant will to render to each one his right"* (Ulpian, *Digest* i, 1); *"to establish the parts of the soul in a natural relation of control"* (Plato, *Republic*, 444e). Justice is the aim of rules and laws, but before that it is the virtue of those who make, implement, and adjudicate those rules and laws. Justice as a virtue is the habit and intention of rendering to each person what is due to them; this virtue is also applied inwardly, through the proper ordering of the soul. Justice reminds us that sometimes what we owe others conflicts with our own desires and interests, making justice difficult to practice. It depends on being habituated in the other virtues as well, especially temperance (which restrains our own desires) and courage (which enables us to assert the just over the unjust).

Loyalty: *the active condition of persisting in an association with another for their intrinsic worth.* It inspires consistency and a willingness to make sacrifices out of love and dedication.

Magnanimity, or "greatness of soul": *the active condition of seeking great things and performing great deeds.* The magnanimous person has a broad-mindedness that arises from contemplation of higher things, which enables her to avoid pettiness, grievance-seeking, and keeping count of wrongs.

Propriety: *appropriateness of inward feeling and outward conduct; the observance of rituals and decorum that reflects discernment of proper behaviour in specific circumstances* (Cicero, *On Duties*, I.93). It reminds us that the good life lived in community obliges us to modulate our internal dispositions with the feelings and expectations of others, and that different circumstances oblige us to behave accordingly.

Reverence: *a sense of awe and respect for those things that are higher than us and that lie beyond our control or understanding.* It reminds us that we are all students and learners of traditions of wisdom that precede us and have formed who we are and may become.

Temperance: *the active condition of choosing bodily pleasures in the ways that harmonize with the life of reason* (Aristotle, *Nic Ethics*, III.10). Temperance is a mean between indulgence and asceticism. Temperance is not about denying bodily pleasures but rather in aligning them with reason to ensure freedom and stability of character. Temperance is expressed as self-control, discipline, restraint in the face of temptation, and mastery over desires and impulses.

Wisdom: *the combination of reasoned, demonstrable knowledge and the apprehension of first principles of living well* (Aristotle, *Nic Ethics* V.6—7). In a culture that divorces demonstrable knowledge (or science) from its sources, wisdom enables human beings to seek alignment with what is true, good, and just, and to avoid choosing on the basis simply of expediency or impulse.

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