

## Reading: Part One

Source: <http://www.achieve.org/adp-network>

# Common Core Standards: The Beginnings



**Achieve**

All students should graduate from high school ready for **college, careers and citizenship**

*Achieve* is proud to be the leading voice for the college- and career-ready agenda, and has helped transform the concept of “college and career readiness for all students” from a radical proposal into a national agenda.

*Achieve* is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit education reform organization dedicated to working with states to raise academic standards and graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability. Created in 1996 by a bipartisan group of governors and business leaders, *Achieve* is leading the effort to make college and career readiness a priority across the country so that students graduating from high school are academically prepared for postsecondary success. When states want to collaborate on education policy or practice, they come to *Achieve*. At the direction of 48 states, and partnering with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, *Achieve* helped develop the Common Core State Standards. Twenty-six states and the National Research Council asked *Achieve* to manage the process to write the Next Generation Science Standards. *Achieve* has also served as the project manager for states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, which are developing next generation assessments. And since 2005, *Achieve* has worked with state teams, governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning key policies with the demands of the real world so that all students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills they need to fully reach their promise in college, careers and life.

**To make college and career readiness a priority in the states, in 2005, *Achieve* launched the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network.**

Starting with only a handful of states, the Network has now grown to include **35 states educating 85 percent of all U.S. public school students**. Through the ADP Network governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives work together to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, graduation requirements and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers.

To close the expectations gap, ADP Network states have committed to the following four actions:

- [Align high school standards and assessments with the knowledge and skills required for the demands of college and careers.](#) [8]
- [Establish graduation requirements that require all high school graduates to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum so that earning a diploma assures a student is prepared for postsecondary education.](#) [9]
- [Develop statewide high school assessment systems anchored to college- and career- ready expectations.](#) [10]
- [Create comprehensive accountability and reporting systems that promote college and career readiness for all students.](#) [11]

Although all Network states are committed to a common set of key policy priorities, there's no one-size-fits-all approach. Each state has developed its own action plan for carrying out the agenda.

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## **Reading: Part Two**

Source: <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>

# **Common Core Standards Initiative Frequently Asked Questions**

## **Overview**

### **What are educational standards?**

Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning.

### **What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics in school.

### **Who leads the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input into the development of the standards.

### **Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?**

High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that are aligned to the expectations in college and careers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad.. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to every state in the country, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies, including:

- the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- and the development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually that will replace existing state testing systems; and
- changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards.

## **Who was involved in the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers, and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. Each state independently made the decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards, beginning in 2010. The federal government was NOT involved in the development of the standards. Local teachers, principals, and superintendents lead the implementation of the Common Core.

## **What guidance do the Common Core State Standards provide to teachers?**

The Common Core State Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level to ultimately be prepared to graduate college and career ready. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

## **How do the Common Core State Standards compare to previous state standards?**

The Common Core State Standards were written by building on the best and highest state standards in existence in the U.S., examining the expectations of other high performing countries around the world, and careful study of the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and careers. No state in the country was asked to lower their expectations for their students in adopting the Common Core. The standards are evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are informed by other top performing countries. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom.

## **Will there be tests based on the Common Core State Standards?**

Yes. States that adopted the Common Core State Standards are currently collaborating to develop common assessments that will be aligned to the standards and replace existing end of year state assessments. These assessments will be available in the 2014-2015 school year.

## **What is the appropriate way to cite the Common Core State Standards?**

Authors: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers

Title: Common Core State Standards (insert specific content area if you are using only one)

Publisher: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C.

Copyright Date: 2010

## Process

### What makes this process different from other efforts to create common standards?

This process is state-led, and has support from across the country, including CCSSO, the NGA Center, Achieve, Inc, ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Hunt Institute, the National Parent Teacher Association, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the American Association of School Administrators, and the Business Roundtable.

### By what criteria were the standards developed?

The Standards made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence, including:

- Scholarly research;
- Surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs;
- Assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance;
- Comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations;
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing for English language arts; and
- Findings from Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and other studies concluding that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement.

### In particular, the following criteria guided the development of the standards:

- Alignment with expectations for college and career success;
- Clarity;
- Consistency across all states;
- Inclusion of content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Improvement upon current state standards and standards of top-performing nations;
- Reality-based, for effective use in the classroom; and
- Evidence and research-based

### Are the standards internationally benchmarked?

Yes. International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career ready standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data used in the benchmarking process is included in this appendix.

### Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?

Yes. Teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. The Common Core State Standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. The National Education

Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations were instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards.

## **What grade levels are included in the Common Core State Standards?**

The English language arts and math standards are for grades K-12. Research from the early childhood and higher education communities also informed the development of the standards.

## **What does this work mean for students with disabilities and English language learners?**

The Common Core State Standards give states the opportunity to share experiences and best practices, which can lead to an improved ability to serve young people with disabilities and English language learners. Additionally, the standards include information on application of the standards for these groups of students.

## **Why are the Common Core State Standards for just English language arts and math?**

English language arts and math were the subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they are areas upon which students build skill sets which are used in other subjects. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes.

## **Are there plans to develop common standards in other areas in the future?**

CCSSO and NGA are not leading the development of standards in other academic content areas. Below is information on efforts of other organizations to develop standards in other academic subjects.

- Science: In a process managed by Achieve, with the help of the National Research Council, the National Science Teachers Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, states are developing the Next Generation Science Standards. More information about this effort can be found [here](#).
- World Languages: The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages published an alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages with the ELA Common Core State Standards. More information about this effort can be found [here](#).
- Arts: The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards is leading the revision of the National Standards for Arts Education. More information about this effort can be found [here](#).

## **Implementation and Future Work**

### **What do the Common Core State Standards mean for students?**

The standards provide clarity and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country. This initiative helps provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of where they live. The Common Core State Standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students, but they will ensure

more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning.

## **How does the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?**

The Common CSS impacts teachers by:

- Providing goals and benchmarks to ensure students are achieving certain skills and knowledge by the end of each year;
- Helping colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers;
- Providing the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of assessments linked to these top-quality standards;
- Allowing states to develop and provide better assessments that more accurately measure whether or not students have learned what was taught; and
- Guiding educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply their knowledge.

## **Who will manage the Common Core State Standards Initiative in the future?**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative was and will remain a state-led effort. In addition to supporting effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards, NGA and CCSSO are committed to developing a long-term sustainability structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers, and other state policymakers. There will be an ongoing state-led development process that can support continuous improvement of the standards.

## **Will common assessments be developed?**

Two consortia of states are developing common assessments – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). These state-led consortia on assessment are grounded in the following principles:

- Allow for comparison across students, schools, districts, states and nations;
- Create economies of scale;
- Provide information and support more effective teaching and learning; and
- Prepare students for college and careers.

## **Will CCSSO and NGA be creating common instructional materials and curricula?**

States that have adopted the standards may choose to work together to develop instructional materials and curricula. As states join together to adopt the same Common Core State Standards, publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards.

## **Does the federal government play a role in standards implementation?**

The federal government had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards and will not have a role in their implementation. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory.

## **Are there data collection requirements associated with the Common Core State Standards?**

There are no data collection requirements of states adopting the CCSS. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the CCSS does not require data collection. The means of assessing students and the data that results from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and unique from the CCSS.

## **Content and Quality of the Standards**

### **Do these standards incorporate both content and skills?**

Yes.

In English language arts, the Common Core State Standards require certain critical content for all students, including:

- Classic myths and stories from around the world;
- America's Founding Documents;
- Foundational American literature; and
- Shakespeare.

The remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the Common Core State Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In Mathematics, the Common Core State Standards lay a solid foundation in:

- whole numbers;
- addition;
- subtraction;
- multiplication;
- division;
- fractions; and
- decimals.

Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically.

## **How complex are the texts suggested by the English language arts standards?**

The Common Core State Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts. For example, the English language arts standards suggest “Grapes of Wrath” as a text that would be appropriate for 9th or 10th grade readers. For more information, please see Appendix A and the Supplement to Appendix A.

## **Do the English language arts standards include a reading list or any other reference to content?**

The Common Core State Standards include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been very well received. This ensures teachers have the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use, while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

## **What type of texts are recommended for the English language arts standards?**

The Common Core State Standards require certain critical content for all students. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelming focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science.

## **Do the math standards cover all the key math topics in the proper sequence?**

The mathematical progressions presented in the Common Core State Standards are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

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### **Reading: Part Three**

Source: <http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3758244>

## **Common Core Under Attack**

**Is the bottom falling out of the Core? As we get closer to implementation, more states are shying away.**



By [Kate Rix](#)

As you read this, at least five of the 45 states that signed on to adopt the new Common Core State Standards have opted not to offer the online assessments designed to measure student outcomes against the standards. Over the summer, a number of other states threw up their hands and said they can't afford the assessment price tag. And in two bellwether states—Indiana and Florida—legislators are getting an earful from grassroots critics who see Common Core as a federal takeover of state education policy. Some have even dubbed it "Obamacore."

Why all the fuss now, two years after most states signed on to align with the national math and ELA standards? And how many more states can drop out before the "common" is lost from Common Core?

There's still a year to go before the standards and assessment officially roll out. Most participating states are already deep into unpacking the standards and training teachers. Common Core is being heralded as a sea change in American education, shifting the focus toward independent thinking, inquiry, and problem solving while sifting diverse state curricula into common alignment.

To close observers, it's no surprise that the debate over Common Core's mission is heating up, given the odd alliances that have formed.

Former U.S. assistant secretary of education (and anti-NCLB firebrand) Diane Ravitch complains that the standards are untested and are not sufficiently benchmarked. She has company in the liberal [Brookings Institution](#), which worries that national standards won't fix persistent achievement gaps within states. Brookings has an ally in the libertarian [Cato Institute](#).

Meanwhile, both national teachers unions support the standards, though they want more time before teachers are held accountable for results. Unions have an unlikely friend in the [Fordham Foundation](#), which regularly sends policy fellows to testify before heated legislative hearings in support of the standards.

"I fully expected this fight and expect more to come next year," says Michael Kirst, professor emeritus of education and business management at Stanford University. "The early stages of Common Core were too good to be true. It spread with virtually no opposition. There's always going to be pushback against anything that fundamentally changes public education."

### **Sticker Shock**

In the spring, one of the two consortia developing online assessments for Common Core announced the cost of its tests. A full suite of summative, formative, and interim tests designed by the [Smarter Balanced](#) consortium will cost states \$27.30 per student. Over the summer, the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers](#) (PARCC) consortium announced its price: \$29.50 per student. Money to develop the tests came from Race to the Top grants, with the goal of providing comparable achievement data across states.

"We were concerned about expense from day one," says Georgia state school superintendent John Barge. In July, Barge announced that Georgia would withdraw from PARCC and would not use its assessments. "All along we were hoping that we'd be able to give some input into other ways of implementing the testing," Barge says. "None of that seemed to pan out and the numbers were higher than projected. We were priced out of the ball game."

Georgia spends just over \$27 million on annual kindergarten readiness, ELA, math, science, social studies, high school graduation, and advanced placement tests. Adding the Common Core assessments would have brought the annual cost to \$56 million. "That was something we just couldn't do," Barge says. Georgia is planning to work with other states that are not part of either consortium.

In addition to Georgia, Alabama, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and Utah have also opted not to commit to using the tests designed by the consortia. (Texas, Virginia, Alaska, and Nebraska never adopted the standards.)

As other states—including Indiana, Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin—debate whether to pull back on their commitment to Common Core and its related assessments, the question looms: Does it matter how many states participate?

"I don't think that not participating in either consortium diminishes the value of having common standards," says Barge. "There's tremendous value in knowing students are being taught to the same standards in English and math."

A more cynical, or perhaps pragmatic, view holds that a common test would keep states honest.

"It does matter," says Andrew Rotherham, a founder of [Bellwether Education Partners](#). "There's a lot of mischief that goes on in assessments that allows states to paint various pictures of how they're doing."

More participating states, Rotherham adds, also means lower, amortized costs per state. Maybe more important, an authentic attempt at a common testing tool could galvanize national focus on student achievement.

### **Federal Involvement**

Common Core was born out of the most recent education reform movement and is closely linked to the [American Diploma Project](#). In 2009, with financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others, the [National Governors Association](#) commissioned the creation of a national math and literacy curriculum. They came up with the Common Core State Standards, a shorter list of standards that emphasize deeper instruction of key - concepts.

Some critics argue that adoption was too heavily incentivized from the beginning, when the Obama administration required that states embrace the standards in order to be eligible for Race to the Top grants.

"A few of our [state board of education] members said they felt the process was hijacked," says Mark Peterson, spokesman for the Utah State Office of Education. "But our state didn't receive Race to the Top funds. We're trying to raise the bar, particularly in mathematics, and do it in as technological and economical a delivery service as we can, given our funding status."

In Utah, citizen groups have protested a perceived over-reach by Common Core to intrude into their state's educational functions, contending that states have no leverage to modify the standards. Some link the Common Core standards to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which conducts national assessments and develops the "nation's report card."

"Their concerns tend to envelop issues that have nothing to do with the standards, including student data privacy concern," explains Peterson. "And it spins out from there, to questions about what the federal government is doing with that data."

Utah opted out of its commitment to using the Smarter Balanced assessments when the state legislature voted to develop its own tests. Utah hired [American Institutes for Research](#) to develop test questions, which will be reviewed by a committee that includes 15 parents.

Utah has already modified Common Core's ELA standards (to include print and cursive handwriting). "We have continually pointed out to critics that we are free to change or eliminate the standard however we see fit," Peterson says.

To be fair, states and the general public are proceeding into Common Core with a lot of unanswered questions.

"It's been like joining a health club where the workouts aren't specified," says Rotherham. "Now the questions are apparent: How many questions will kids have to answer right? Is this what we signed up for?"

### **Transparency and Engagement**

The escalating debate over Common Core may have been inevitable. The fight is over both curriculum and federalism. But was some of the dissension avoidable?

Sandra Stotsky, a scholar in education reform who served on Common Core's standards validation committee in 2009-10, has become one of CCSS's most vocal critics. Among her complaints: The standards were written and approved without an appropriate public comment process.

"Common Core's proponents could have laid the groundwork better and engaged with critics," agrees Rotherham. "There is more support for this among national elites than there is local support."

Now, however, even avid supporters agree that it's time for Common Core's developers to make their case at the state and local level.

"States and localities and organizations that support Common Core need to do their own specific communication with the public," says Stanford's Michael Kirst. "And 2013-14 is the time, the right time. There will be piloted assessments in the spring. This is when the public will get interested."

For some, it may be too late. Stotsky, who directed revisions of Massachusetts's PreK-12 standards from 1999 to 2003, argues that the Common Core cut score for "college and career ready" is dumbed down, particularly when compared with Massachusetts's high standards."

Common Core levels the field, but how low do you level the field?" Stotsky asks. "If these were rigorous standards, that might mean something. We're told these are stronger than anything we've ever had. But these standards lower the level of academic achievement about two grade levels across the board."

### **Operational Challenges**

Reasonable educators can disagree about standards and curriculum, but everyone agrees on one thing: Common Core's plans for online assessments will present an operational headache that could last for years.

The computer-adaptive consortia tests will be administered online. Mathematics tests will require that students show their work to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts behind the questions. ELA assessments will include short essays.

"There will be a two- or three-year period that won't be very pretty," says Bruce Hunter, an associate executive director of [the American Association of School Administrators](#). "There was all this happy talk early on about how the tests would all be online. It turns out that in most states, if you did the testing cycle in the same week statewide, there isn't the bandwidth. You could shut down the Internet."

During a February focus group in Los Angeles, of the representatives present for 40 school districts beginning their Common Core preparations, only one reported that he had received sufficient technical support.

"There will be 13,625 operating school districts—100,000 public schools—all vying to change something at the same moment," Hunter says. "I do not hear opposition to Common Core or the staff development required. What I hear are [fears about the] technical issues."

A few states may be ahead of the game on the technical side. This spring, Utah public schools will implement a statewide computer-adaptive system. Over a five-year period, the state will spend \$6.7 million to transition to online testing—a move that was planned before Common Core was in the picture.

But even when the computers and the Wi-Fi and the technical support are all in place, school districts will have another, more slippery challenge to contend with: public expectations of test results.

As we've already seen, wholly new curricula, standards, and assessments will inevitably lead to a drop in test scores—at least initially.

Kentucky was an early adopter of the new standards, and the state's teachers taught a Common Core curriculum in the 2011-12 school year. After the first assessment, a paper-and-pencil test designed by Pearson to align with the new curricula, the state proficiency rate dropped more than 30 points. New York state released similar results in August for the 2012-13 school year: Students in grades 3-8 scored 20 to 30 percent lower than the year before.

"Relying on one test is a mistake," says Hunter. "The question is, how do we track better learning? What superintendents and principals need right now is for states to help the public [to have] realistic expectations. When you switch tests, scores drop. What we need is for parents not to feel they got shortchanged, or that we haven't properly measured what children have learned. It'll take a while, and in some places, it'll take longer than others."

### **The Next Stage**

Can Common Core achieve its goal of leveling the playing field across all states and creating comparable data?

Some say no, but advocates believe it will get close.

"There is no apples-to-apples [comparison], even if all kids have the same curriculum and take the same test," says Hunter. "Schools are funded unequally. Not everybody has the same opportunity to learn. Common Core gets us closer, but there is no silver bullet."

The standards may not be as rigorous as some critics would like, but they're an improvement on what most states have now, Hunter adds.

Even as state education officials and policymakers debate the standards' merits and companion assessments, the next chapter for the initiative has begun. Teachers across the country are unpacking the standards to see what they might really mean for classroom instruction.

The extreme left and right may never agree on what American schoolchildren should be taught, and how, but these new standards, properly implemented, have the potential to mark a sea change for teaching in the United States.

"Common Core is a huge game changer," says Stanford's Kirst. "It is one of the most important movements in my 50-year career. It's worth fighting for."

—*Fall 2013*—