Common Core State Standards
An Introduction for Administrators

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School and district administrators will play a critical role in the successful roll-out of the Common Core State Standards. It is, therefore, imperative that administrators have a firm grasp on the implications of the Common Core and strategies for successful implementation. This brochure, published by **Hanover Research**, answers common questions about the Common Core specifically for administrators, discussing the positive changes the initiative aims to bring about in today's classrooms and the steps administrators should consider for smooth implementation. With Common Core discussions active in school districts and communities across the nation, it is important that you, as an administrator, join in the conversation and lead your school or district toward successful implementation practices.

Why The Common Core?

The **Common Core State Standards** (CCSS) provide uniform, clear expectations for the knowledge and skills that students should be able to demonstrate in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics at the conclusion of each K-12 grade level. An initiative overseen by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) and supported by partner organizations, including Achieve, ACT, and the College Board, the CCSS establish evidence-based and internationally benchmarked standards for the nation's students. The standards will create consistent expectations for student achievement across all participating states, defining the knowledge and skills necessary for students to succeed in higher education and careers and ensuring that every student is prepared for life after high school. Implementation supports the following outcomes:

I. College Readiness

High school graduates prepared to enter for-credit degree and certificate pathways at two-year and four-year institutions of higher education

II. Career Readiness

High school graduates prepared to enter the workforce and to compete with peers in the United States and abroad

III. Consistency and Transparency

Clear and concise standards that make expectations transparent for students and parents and that are consistent across states

IV. Equal Opportunity

Equal opportunity for a rigorous and high-quality education no matter where students live

V. Collaboration

Collaboration between states to develop educational materials, comprehensive assessments, and tools and policies to support educators and schools

About the Common Core

A voluntary program, states began to independently decide to adopt the Common Core State Standards in 2010. As of 2013, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS, though implementation timelines vary.[i] The standards build upon the highest state standards and draw upon scholarly research and literature focused on college- and career-readiness.[ii] At its core, the CCSS structure aims to provide fewer, clearer, and higher standards to guide our nation's schools, replacing the lengthy, vague, and input-focused standards of the past.[iii] Intended for all students, the standards can be adapted to fit the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities.

The standards are the product of collaboration between teachers, parents, administrators, educational researchers, and content experts. The developers chose English language arts and mathematics as the first subjects to receive Common Core alignment because these areas form the foundation for all other subjects.[iv]

Fewer ▼	Clearer ▼	Higher ▼
In general, standards are teachable within one year, so a single standard is not repeated across multiple grade levels.	Rather than vague or broad descriptions, the standards provide precise descriptions of expected outcomes.	While not necessarily harder, the standards raise the bar in that what is stated in the standards is expected for all students every year.

English Language Arts[v]

The English Language Arts standards define knowledge and skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The **Reading** standards follow a staircase model, wherein students read texts of increasing complexity as they progress through the grade levels. The standards balance classic and contemporary literature with informational, non-fiction texts. The standards do not dictate specific texts that students must read, though they do stipulate that four critical content areas be covered: classic myths and stories, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and Shakespeare. The **Writing** standards require students to express logical arguments founded on sound reasoning and evidence. The standards require students in even the earliest grades to begin writing opinion pieces and forming evidence-based arguments and further emphasize both short and in-depth research projects. The Speaking and Listening standards require that students acquire the skills necessary to clearly present increasingly complex information and ideas. Finally, the **Language** standards outline expectations for students to expand their academic vocabulary.

Mathematics[vi]

The **K-5 standards** require that students build a solid foundation in key mathematical concepts—whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals—laying the groundwork for more advanced mathematical concepts and procedures. K-5 students must grasp procedural skills and gain conceptual understanding as to why the math works.

Having established a strong foundation in the early grades, students will be ready to tackle hands-on learning in geometry, algebra, probability, and statistics. At the next level, the **middle grades standards** demand rich preparation for the more advanced mathematics students will encounter in high school.

Finally, the **high school standards** ask students to think and reason mathematically, applying learned concepts to real-world issues and problems. The standards stress mathematical modeling and define a rigorous standard for college- and career-readiness.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Does the Common Core stipulate the use of a common curriculum?

A. The Common Core outlines end-goals—the skills and knowledge that students should be able to demonstrate upon completing a grade level—while allowing individual schools and teachers to determine the best path for students to follow in achieving those goals. [vii] Furthermore, the Common Core does not dictate the use of specific texts in the classroom. Rather, the standards provide guidance on text complexity by grade level, citing sample texts, but leaving teachers with flexibility in selecting texts to use in the classroom. While the standards require that schools integrate certain critical content areas into the curriculum (e.g., Shakespeare in ELA and fractions in mathematics), most crucial decisions regarding content coverage reside with state and local educational agencies. [viii]

Q. Does the federal government mandate participation in the Common Core?

A. The federal government does not require state participation in the Common Core State Standards Initiative, nor did the federal government participate in the development of the standards. The Common Core is a state-led and voluntary initiative. [ix]

Q. How will the Common Core impact state assessments?

A. Two state consortia—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)—have been developing assessments aligned to the Common Core over the past several years. According to the implementation plan, the PARCC and SBAC assessments, released this spring, should replace traditional state-level exams in participating states in the 2014-2015 school year. Many states will be piloting the new assessments this year. [x]

Q. What instructional shifts will be necessary under the Common Core?

A. Under the Common Core State Standards, districts and schools must implement shifts in priority areas and approaches to learning. Several broad changes include:

- Greater focus on depth of learning in key areas as opposed to breadth of content

- Expectations for students to read and analyze more difficult, complex texts

- Greater emphasis on informational and expository (non-fiction) texts

- Greater expectations for early and continued development of academic vocabulary

- Clearer progression of skills within grade levels and from one grade level to the next

- More concrete connections between classroom learning and real-world problem-solving [xi]

Recommendations for Action

Adoption of the Common Core requires that districts and schools adapt curriculum plans and instructional strategies to reflect changes in the end-goals for student learning. Successfully navigating the transition requires strong leadership from school and district administrators.

What are successful practices for **School Principals?**

The National Association of Elementary School Principals recommends the following practices for implementation:

- Establish a **vision** and timeline for the transition to the Common Core.

- Create a Common Core **instructional leadership team.**

- Engage teachers and promote buy-in through **clear communications.**

- Allow for an **incubation period** for teachers to reflect on the new standards.

- Identify necessary **curricular adjustments.**

- Identify which subjects or grade spans will be at the forefront of implementation.

- Determine which subjects or grade spans might need greater support.

- Establish a plan for English language learners, students with IEPs, and gifted/talented students.

- Communicate changes to **parents and community members.**

- Collect information to understand teachers' professional development needs.

- Plan job-embedded **professional development** for teachers.

- Determine required adjustments in budget, staff, professional development, and other areas.

- Outline strategies to monitor **implementation** efforts over time.[xii]

What are successful practices for **District Administrators?**

As district administrators approach Common Core implementation, they should maintain awareness of state-issued guidelines. Broad recommendations for a successful transition include the following:

- Assemble a **stakeholder committee** to guide implementation efforts. The committee may include district and school administrators, board members, teachers, specialists, and community members.

- Develop an **implementation schedule** and plan. Decide what format makes the most sense for the district—should implementation first be carried out in pilot schools, or staggered by year, grade span, or content area?

- Explain to stakeholders how the CCSS promote equitable educational opportunities across geographic boundaries. **Analyze data** to identify gaps and plan interventions for students who enter a grade level underprepared.

- Create a **long-term, systemic professional development plan** that will reach teachers at all grade levels, as well as principals and staff, in light of necessary shifts in content and pedagogy.

- **Foster discussion** about the standards across content areas, involving teachers from social studies, science, and technical subjects in the conversation.

- Review existing instructional materials and **explore new resources** related to the CCSS as they emerge, designating teacher teams to make recommendations on the materials best-suited for the district's students.

- Design a **transition plan**, articulating how the district will determine and communicate necessary curricular changes. Engage teachers to decide where shifts in complexity, depth, or content will be necessary.[xiii]

i A 46th state, Minnesota, has adopted only the ELA standards.
ii "Frequently Asked Questions," Common Core State Standards Initiative. http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions
iii "Why the Common Core? How these Standards are Different," Student Achievement Partners, p. 5. http://www.achievethecore.org/page/398/why-the-common-core-how-these-standards-are-different
iv "The Common Core State Standards Initiative," Council of Chief State School Officers. http://www.ccsso.org/Resources/Programs/The_Common_Core_State_Standards_Initiative.html
v "Key Points in English Language Arts," Common Core State Standards Initiative. http://www.corestandards.org/resources/key-points-in-english-language-arts
vi "Key Points in Mathematics," Common Core State Standards Initiative. http://www.corestandards.org/resources/key-points-in-mathematics
vii McShane, M, "5 Things Every Parent Needs to Know About The Common Core," The American, June 15, 2013. http://www.american.com/archive/2013/july/5-things-every-parent-needs-to-know-about-the-common-core
viii "Myths vs. Facts," Common Core State Standards Initiative. http://www.corestandards.org/resources/myths-vs-facts
ix "Frequently Asked Questions," Op. cit.
x McShane, M. Op. cit.
xi "Common Core State Standards: Shifts for Students and Parents," engageNY. http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/shifts-for-students-and-parents.pdf
xii "Common Core Implementation Checklist," National Association of Elementary School Principals, Center for Educational Improvement. http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/common%20core%20check-list_2_22_2013as.pdf
xiii "Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards – What Do District Administrators Need to Know?" Education Northwest, September 2011. http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1166