



Common Core State Standards
An Introduction for Parents



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As a parent, it is important that you understand the implications of the Common Core State Standards and how to best support your child in a time of transition in the classroom. This brochure, published by **Hanover Research**, seeks to answer common questions about the implementation of the Common Core, the positive changes the initiative aims to bring about in today's classrooms, how your child will be affected by the transition, and how you can support your child in the learning process. With Common Core discussions active in school districts and communities across the nation, it is important that you, as a parent, join in the conversation.

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 end of each K-12 grade level. 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. The Common Core 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 ▼

In general, standards are teachable within one year, so a single standard is not repeated across multiple grade levels.

Clearer ▼

Rather than vague or broad descriptions, the standards provide precise descriptions of expected outcomes.

Higher ▼

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 mean a common curriculum?

A. In adopting the Common Core, educators agree to a specific set of learning standards, but do not face restrictions in choosing a curriculum for the classroom. A useful analogy to consider is that of a journey—the Common Core State Standards represent the destination, and the curriculum represents the map to get there. In other words, 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}

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.^{viii}

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.^{ix}

Q. How will the Common Core impact my child's education?

A. Under the Common Core State Standards, you will see subtle shifts in priority areas and approaches to learning. Parents can anticipate several broad changes, including:

- 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^x

Q. How can I prepare for the transition to the Common Core?

A. Parents can take several steps to prepare for the Common Core implementation:

- Meet with other parents, school staff, and community members to examine and discuss the new standards.
- Through a parent-teacher association or school committee, learn how teachers will implement the new standards.
- Attend school board meetings. Inquire about how parents can provide feedback and support students.
- Talk to your child about the importance of college and career readiness.
- Keep the conversation about the need for high educational standards going through discussions with business and community leaders.^{xi}

Recommendations for Action

With implementation of the Common Core, parents will see broad shifts in both English language arts and mathematics. It is important that parents are aware of the changes students will see in the classroom and prepared to take action to help their child navigate the change and succeed in meeting the rigorous standards put forth in the Common Core. An online resource of the New York State Education Department, engageNY, recommends specific actions that parents can take to support learning at home: ^{xii}

IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND LITERACY:	
Your child will...	To support your child...
Read non-fiction and fiction in equal amounts.*	Provide opportunities for your child to read non-fiction texts. Read together and show your child that non-fiction materials can be interesting and fun.
Read to explore the world, learning science and social studies.	Supply your child with non-fiction texts that explain topics that interest him or her. Discuss ideas or themes that emerge from the texts.
Tackle challenging materials by reading closely.	Supply your child with both interesting texts he or she can read comfortably and more challenging texts you can read together.
Use evidence from selected text(s) in reading discussions.	Discuss reading materials with your child, demanding evidence to support his or her observations and opinions.
Use evidence to write non-fiction works.	Encourage your child to write at home independently and with you.
Expand his/her academic vocabulary.	Read often to infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and young children. Talk, listen, sing, and play rhyming games to encourage vocabulary development.
IN MATHEMATICS:	
Your child will...	To support your child...
Focus on fewer topics, examining those concepts in greater depth.	Learn what the priority skills and knowledge areas are for your child's grade level. Inquire about your child's progress in key areas.
Master skills within and across grade levels.	Familiarize yourself with the areas your child struggled with in the previous year and learn how gaps in skills might affect learning in the current year.
Develop speed and accuracy in applying math skills.	Encourage your child to learn and memorize basic math facts and make time for lots of practice problems.
Demonstrate knowledge of why the math works.	Provide ample time for working with math problems at home. Observe your child and discuss problems to determine if he or she really knows why the math works.
Use mastered skills and knowledge to solve real-world problems.	As opportunities to do math arise in everyday life (for example, figuring out the cost of items in the grocery store check-out line), ask your child to do the math.
Learn to think quickly and to solve problems.	Determine which side of the coin your child has mastered and which side needs more work. Provide opportunities for your child to think about and use math often.

Adapted from: "Common Core State Standards: Shifts for Students and Parents." engageNY.

*In ELA and across content areas.

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 "Frequently Asked Questions," Op. cit.

ix McShane, M., Op. cit.

x "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>

xi "Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards – What Do Parents Need to Know?" *Education Northwest*, March 2011, http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1106

xii "Common Core State Standards: Shifts for Students and Parents," Op. cit.