



Common Core State Standards
An Introduction for Teachers



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As a teacher, it is important that you understand the implications of the Common Core State Standards and how to best navigate this 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, and how instruction will be impacted by the transition. With Common Core discussions active in school districts and communities across the nation, it is important that you, as a teacher, 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 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 ▼

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

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

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. 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. Were teachers involved in the development of the Common Core?

A. The process of drafting the new standards involved many classroom teachers, as well as standards experts, state experts, school administrators, and parents. Organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) helped collect feedback, ensuring that the critical voices of teachers were heard during the development phase.^x

Q. Will the Common Core affect teachers outside ELA and mathematics?

A. The Common Core stresses the importance of integrating non-fiction texts into the curriculum, aligning with the focus of college and career readiness on texts outside the boundaries of literary fiction. Teachers in disciplines such as history and science, then, play a role in developing reading and writing skills across the curriculum.^{xi}

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.^{xii}

Q. How will the Common Core impact teachers?

A. The Common Core State Standards initiative will:

- Outline goals and benchmarks for student achievement for each grade level
- Help guide teacher preparation and professional development programs
- Allow teachers to participate in the development of linked assessments
- Encourage state assessments that more accurately determine student achievement
- Help educators select curricula and strategies to promote deep learning^{xiii}

Recommendations for Action

Adoption of the Common Core requires that teachers adapt curriculum plans and instructional strategies to reflect changes in the end-goals for student learning. Successfully navigating the transition requires that teachers have a firm grasp on the standards themselves and the necessary shifts that must take place in the classroom. An online resource of the New York State Education Department, engageNY, outlines the broad shifts required by the Common Core in ELA and mathematics:^{xiv}

IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND LITERACY:	IN MATHEMATICS:
Students will...	Students will...
Read non-fiction and fiction in equal amounts.*	Focus on fewer topics, in greater depth.
Read to explore the world, learning science and social studies.	Master skills within and across grade levels.
Tackle challenging materials by reading closely.	Develop speed and accuracy in applying math skills.
Use evidence from selected text(s) in reading discussions.	Demonstrate knowledge of why the math works.
Use evidence to write non-fiction works.	Use mastered skills to solve real-world problems.
Expand his/her academic vocabulary.	Learn to think quickly and to solve problems.

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

* In ELA and across content areas.

While the exact changes necessary for classroom instruction will vary significantly based on a teacher's discipline and assigned grade level, as teachers look at the "big picture" of Common Core implementation, they may consider the following recommendations:

- Engage students in **high-level discussions** grounded in the selected text
- Focus lessons on the process of **discovery**, rather than simply on content
- Use activities and assignments that integrate **real-world problems**
- Help students develop the ability to form solid, **logical arguments**, rather than rely on persuasion
- Choose appropriately **complex texts** and help students tackle texts of advanced complexity over time^{xv}

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 Ibid.

xi "Myths vs. Facts," Op. cit.

xii McShane, M. Op. cit.

xiii "Frequently Asked Questions," Op. cit.

xiv "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>

xv Davis, L. "5 Things Every Teacher Should Be Doing to Meet the Common Core State Standards," *Eye on Education*, 2012, http://perl.state.nm.us/perl/CCDocuments/5ThingsCCSS_Davis.pdf