

Frequently Asked Questions

The following provides answers to some of the frequently asked questions about the Common Core State Standards, from how they were developed to what they mean for states and local communities.

Overview

What are educational standards?

Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, while also helping parents understand what is expected of their children.

What is the Common Core?

State education chiefs and governors in 48 states came together to develop the Common Core, a set of clear college- and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. Today, 43 states have voluntarily adopted and are working to implement the standards, which are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to take credit bearing introductory courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce.

Who led the development of the Common Core State Standards?

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (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.

The actual implementation of the Common Core, including how the standards are taught, the curriculum developed, and the materials used to support teachers as they help students reach the standards, is led entirely at the state and local levels.

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 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.

Why are the Common Core State Standards important?

High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which varied widely from state to state, the Common Core enables collaboration among states on a range of tools and policies, including the:

- Development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials
- Development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems that replace existing state testing systems in order to measure student performance annually and provide teachers with specific feedback to help ensure students are on the path to success
- Development of tools and other supports to help educators and schools ensure all students are able to learn the new standards

Who was involved in the development of the Common Core State Standards?

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. Local teachers, principals, and superintendents lead the implementation of the Common Core in their states. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards.

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 so they can be prepared to succeed in college, career, and life. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will devise their own lesson plans and curriculum, and tailor their instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

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

The Common Core was developed by building on the best state standards in the United States; examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world; and carefully studying the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college, career, and life. No state was asked to lower their expectations for students in adopting the Common Core. The evidence-based standards were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country, so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom.

How much will it cost states to implement the Common Core State Standards?

Costs for implementing the standards will vary from state to state and territory. While states already spend significant amounts of money on professional development, curriculum materials, and assessments, there will be some additional costs associated with the Common Core, such as training teachers to teach the standards, developing and purchasing new materials, and other aspects of implementation. However, there are also opportunities for states to save considerable resources by using technology, open-source materials, and taking advantage of cross-state opportunities that come from sharing consistent standards.

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)

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Process

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

From the very beginning, the process of developing the Common Core has been bipartisan and state led. It also has support from educators, policymakers, and business leaders 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, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Business Roundtable.

What evidence and criteria were used to develop the standards?

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

- Scholarly research
- Surveys on the skills 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
- Findings from Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and other studies, which conclude that the traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement

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
- Evidence- and research-based

What role did international benchmarking play in the development of the standards?

International benchmarking refers to analyzing high-performing education systems and identifying ways to improve our own system based on those findings. One of the ways to analyze education systems is to compare international assessments, particularly the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Prior to the development of the Common Core State Standards, research revealed striking similarities among the standards in top-performing nations, along with stark differences between those world-class expectations and the standards adopted by most U.S. states. As a result, standards from top-performing countries were consulted during the development of the Common Core State Standards. The college- and career-ready standards appendix lists the evidence consulted.

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 for these groups of students.

Why are the Common Core State Standards only for 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 that are used in other subjects. Students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so the standards specify the literacy skills and understandings required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines.

It is important to note that the literacy standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects for grades 6–12 are meant to supplement content standards in those areas, not replace them. States determine how to incorporate these standards into their standards for those subjects or adopt them as content area literacy standards.

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: States have developed Next Generation Science Standards 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. 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?

Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. To ensure all students are prepared for success after graduation, the Common Core establishes a set of clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in math and English language arts.

How do the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?

The standards impact teachers by:

- Providing them with consistent goals and benchmarks to ensure students are progressing on a path for success in college, career, and life
- Providing them with consistent expectations for students who move into their districts and classrooms from other states
- Providing them the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across the country as they develop curricula, materials, and assessments linked to high-quality standards
- Helping colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers

What supports are being provided to teachers to help them ensure students are prepared to reach the new goals established by the Common Core?

Decisions on how to implement the standards, including the right supports to put in place, are made at the state and local levels. As such, states and localities are taking different approaches to implementing the standards and providing their teachers with the supports they need to help students successfully reach the standards. To learn how states are supporting teachers and implementing their new standards, visit the [“Standards in Your State” section](#) for a map linking to the state-specific implementation page.

Do the standards tell teachers what to teach?

Teachers know best about what works in the classroom. That is why these standards establish what students need to learn, but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers decide how best to help students reach the standards.

Who will manage the Common Core State Standards in the future?

The Common Core State Standards are and will remain a state-led effort, and adoption of the standards and any potential revisions will continue to be a voluntary state decision. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers will continue to serve as the two leading organizations with ownership of the Common Core and will make decisions about the timing and substance of future revisions to the standards in consultation with the states.

Federal funds have never and will never be used to support the development or governance of the Common Core or any future revisions of the standards. Any future revisions will be made based on research and evidence. Governance of the standards will be independent of governance of related assessments.

Will common assessments be developed?

Two state-led consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers ([PARCC](#)) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium ([Smarter Balanced](#)), are currently working to develop assessments that aim to provide meaningful feedback to ensure that students are progressing toward attaining the necessary skills to succeed in college, career, and life. These assessments are expected to be available in the 2014-2015 school year. Most states have chosen to participate in one of the two consortia. For more information, [visit the website of your state’s assessment consortium](#).

Two additional consortia, working through the [National Center and State Collaborative Partnership](#) and the [Dynamic Learning Maps Alternative Assessment System Consortium](#), are developing a new generation of assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Will CCSSO and the NGA Center be creating common instructional materials and curricula?

No. The standards are not curricula and do not mandate the use of any particular curriculum. Teachers are able to develop their own lesson plans and choose materials, as they have always done. States that have adopted the standards may choose to work together to develop instructional materials and curricula. As states work individually to implement their new standards, publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards.

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

No. Implementing the Common Core State Standards does not require data collection. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. The means of

assessing students and the data that result from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and unique from the Common Core.

Content and Quality of the Standards

Do the Common Core State Standards incorporate both content and skills?

Yes. In English language arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including:

- Classic myths and stories from around the world
- America's founding documents
- Foundational American literature
- Shakespeare

The remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are made at the state and local levels. 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 standards lay a solid foundation in:

- Whole numbers
- Addition
- Subtraction
- Multiplication
- Division
- Fractions
- 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.

Across the English language arts and mathematics standards, skills critical to each content area are emphasized. In particular, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, and critical-thinking skills are interwoven into the standards.

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 on suggested texts, please see Appendix A, the Supplement to Appendix A, and Appendix B.

Do the English language arts standards include a required reading list?

No. 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. 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 types 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 the literature and literary nonfiction texts that they choose. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly 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.

Why is the sequence of key math topics in the math standards important?

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