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Common Core State Standards Initiative
Frequently Asked Questions

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.

Why do we need educational standards?
We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students.

Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have so that teachers can build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms. Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success. Standards are a first step – a key building block – in providing our young people with a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college and work. Of course, standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

How are educational standards determined now?
Today, each state has its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn can vary widely from state to state.

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Is having common standards the first step toward nationalizing education?
No. Common core standards are a state-led effort to give all students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The federal government has not been involved in the development of the standards. Individual states will choose whether or not to adopt these standards.

What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?
The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics that states can share and voluntarily adopt. The standards have been informed by the best available evidence and the highest state standards across the country and globe and designed by a diverse group of teachers, experts, parents, and school administrators, so they reflect both our aspirations for our children and the realities of the classroom. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?
We want to make sure that every child across the country is given the tools they need to succeed. High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that everyone can work toward together. This will ensure that we maintain America's competitive edge, so that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here at home, but with students from around the world.

These standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.

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Of course, standards cannot single-handedly improve the quality of our nation's education system, but they do give educators shared goals and expectations for their students. For example, the common core state standards will enable participating states to work together to:

- Make expectations for students clear to parents, teachers, and the general public;
- Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the common core state standards that will replace the existing testing systems that too often are inconsistent, burdensome and confusing; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

Who is leading the Common Core State Standards Initiative?
Parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders, through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) are leading the effort to develop a common core of state standards.

In addition, CCSSO and the NGA Center have provided public comment periods for everyone to submit feedback on the draft standards documents. Those comments will be incorporated into the final standards.

Please visit corestandards.org to see a list of endorsing partners and statements of support for the initiative.

How will states adopt the common core state standards?
State standards adoption depends on the laws of each state. Some states will adopt the standards through their state boards of education, while others will adopt them through their state legislatures. CCSSO and the NGA Center will ask states to share their adoption timeline and process in early 2010, when the K-12 common core state standards are completed.

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Will the common core state standards keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?
No. Common core standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide *how* the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?
Yes. Teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. 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 have been instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards.

We encourage teachers and practitioners to submit comments and feedback on the standards through the web site corestandards.org.

Does having common standards lead to dumbing down the standards across the board?
Not at all. The common core standards have been built from the best and highest state standards in the country. They 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. Far from looking for the "lowest common denominator," these standards are designed to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, are learning what they need to know to graduate from high school ready for college or a career.

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Will more standards mean more tests?
No. For states that choose to adopt these common standards, having one set of standards will make it easier for states to pool information and resources to develop a shared set of high-quality tests to better evaluate student progress. The goal is not to have more tests, but to have smarter and better tests that help students, parents, and teachers.

Process

What makes this process different from other efforts to create common standards?
This process is different because it is state-led, and has the support of educators across the country as well as prominent education, business, and state leaders' organizations, 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.

Are these national standards?
The federal government is NOT involved in the development of the standards. This has been a state-led and driven initiative from the beginning. States will voluntarily adopt the standards based on the timelines and context in their state.

Who or what entity determines the common core state standards?
CCSSO and the NGA Center have been leading the standards development process in consultation with teachers, parents, experts and administrators. To ensure that this process is open, inclusive, and rigorous, several working groups and committees have been formed. They include the:

- Standards Development Work Group - responsible for determining and writing the common core state standards. Click here to view the list of work and feedback group members.

- Feedback Group - provides information backed by research to inform the standards development process by offering expert input on draft documents.
- Validation Committee – nominated by states and national organizations and selected by a group of 12 governors and chiefs who hold leadership positions at NGA Center and CCSSO. These independent, national education experts will review the common core state standards to ensure they meet the development criteria. Click here to view the Validation Committee.

Members of the work and feedback group are listed on the site www.corestandards.org. The approval process for the standards also includes public comment periods during which anyone who is interested in the standards can submit their comments for review.

By what criteria are the standards being developed?

The standards are being developed by the following criteria:

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success
- Clear, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn
- Consistent across all states, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live
- Include both content *and* the application of knowledge through high-order skills
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations
- Realistic, for effective use in the classroom
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society
- Evidence and research -based

Criteria have been set by states, through their national organizations CCSSO and the NGA Center.

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What grade levels will be 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 have also informed the development of the standards.

What does this work mean for students with disabilities and English language learners?
Common standards will provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices within and across states that can lead to an improved ability to best serve young people with disabilities and English language learners. Additionally, the K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English language learners and students with disabilities.

Why are the common core state standards for just English-language arts and math? Are there plans to develop common standards in other areas in the future? English-language arts and math were the first subjects chosen for the common core state standards because these two subjects are skills, upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes.

Of course, other subject areas are critical to young people's education and their success in college and careers. Once the English-language arts and math standards are developed, CCSSO and NGA Center, on behalf of the states, plan to develop a common core of standards in science and potentially additional subject areas.

Will these standards incorporate both content and skills?
Both content and skills are important and have been incorporated in the common core state standards. One of the criteria by which the standards will be evaluated is whether or not they include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order thinking skills.

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Implementation and Future Work

What will these common core state standards mean for students?

The standards will provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country. Currently, every state has its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students at the same grade level in each state may be expected to achieve to different levels. This initiative will allow states to share information effectively and help provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of where they live. Common 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. In a global economy, students must be prepared to compete with not only their American peers in the next state, but with students from around the world. These standards will help prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and careers.

How will these standards impact teachers?

The standards will provide important goals for teachers to ensure they are preparing students for success in college and the workforce. They will help teachers develop and implement effective strategies for their students by providing benchmarks for skills and knowledge that their students should have by the end of the year. The common core state standards will help colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers; provide the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of assessments linked to these top-quality standards; allow states to develop and provide better assessments that more accurately measure whether or not students have learned what was taught; and guide 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.

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Will the Common Core State Standards be updated?
Yes. There will be an ongoing state-led development process that can support continuous improvement of the standards.

Will common assessments be developed?
Like adoption of common core standards, it will be up to the states: some states plan to come together voluntarily to develop a common assessment system, based on the common core state standards. A state-led consortium on assessment would be 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.

Instructional materials and curricula are key components to making standards usable and real in the classroom. Will CCSSO and NGA be creating common instructional materials and curricula?
States that adopt the standards may choose to work together to develop instructional materials and curricula. As states join together to adopt the same common core, publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards. Working together will allow states the opportunity to share best thinking and practices as well as pool resources in their efforts to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to successfully implement these standards.

What is the role of the federal government in standards implementation?
The federal government has had no role in the development of the common core state standards and will not have a role in their implementation.

However, the federal government will have the opportunity to support states as they begin adopting the standards. For example, the federal government can

- Support this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability

structure, and offering financial support for states to implement the standards.

- Provide long-term financial support for the development and implementation of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, and research to help continually improve the common core state standards over time.
- Revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from the best of what works in other nations and from research.