



Education

Education Brief

The Common Core State Standards Initiative

February 2011





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Important Note:

Since the Common Core is still unfolding, this Education Brief will be updated periodically. Please check www.mheccsi.com for the most up-to-date information.

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Executive Summary:

The Top 10 Things to Know about The Common Core Standards Initiative

1. What is the Common Core Standards Initiative?

The Common Core Standards Initiative is a collaborative effort led by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief School Officers with partners and leaders across education and business, aimed to establish a shared set of clear educational standards for English language arts and mathematics that states can voluntarily adopt. The intention of the CCSS is to have a rigorous set of standards that specifically identify the learning outcomes needed to help schools prepare students to be college and career ready.

2. Which states are adopting the Common Core?

As of January, 2011, 40 states, and the District of Columbia have formally or informally committed to adopting the Common Core State Standards for English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12 and are in the process of aligning state assessments, curriculum, and classroom practices to integrate the new standards. Alaska, Texas, and Virginia have indicated that they do not plan to adopt the standards.

3. How will states assess the Common Core?

Two consortia have been awarded competitive grant funds for the development of tests to assess the Common Core Standards. SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) was awarded a four-year \$176 million Race to the Top assessment grant by the U.S. Department of Education to develop a student assessment system aligned to a Common Core of academic standards. Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC or Partnership) PARCC RttT Assessment Consortium was awarded \$170 of the \$330 million. Assessments are expected for 2014 and are expected to include results from performance-based tasks through testing and traditional end-of-year assessments. Both plan to include end of year assessments offered online.

4. How will states implement and fund the Common Core?

This will be a hot area to watch as districts do not yet know how they will fully manage the implementation of the Common Core and the budget required to introduce new assessments and new curricula. We do know that states will be working within a three-year timeline as assessments are anticipated to be ready for 2014.

5. What will Common Core Implementation plans need to address?

There is currently no governance in place yet so the specifics of implementation are still unfolding as states sign on. It is expected that Common Core implementation plans will need to address the following items:

- Developing research-based practices using Common Core
- Developing teacher training and PD
- Researching and Aligning instructional material
- Investigating formative and summative assessments to be used before or instead of rollout of common assessments.

6. What role will the U.S. DOE play?

Although the U.S. DOE supports the Common Core Initiative, they have had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards. Their involvement moving forward will depend heavily on future elections and overall changes to the role of the Federal Government in education. If the Fed continues to be a driving force in setting the education agenda with a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act then they could play a big role in linking competitive grant funding to the adoption and successful implementation of the Common Core Standards and new requirements for College and Career ready students.

7. What's happening with The Common Core Standards in Reading/ELA?

1. The following are the areas that have surfaced as leading considerations/factors with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, Technical Subjects:

- **Increased Rigor/Text Complexity:** An emphasis on supporting students in being able to work with increasingly more complex texts.
- **Nonfiction & Informational Text:** While this includes a heavy focus on nonfiction, in particular information texts; and on

- Writing: Increased emphasis on writing, in particular across the curriculum.
- Content area responsibility for literacy: An acknowledgement that literacy development is a shared responsibility across the content domains.
- Vocabulary: A focus on general academic vocabulary and domain-specific vocabulary.
- Independent reading: While the emphasis of the CCSS is upon reading, writing, speaking and listening; the intention is that a concentrated effort be placed upon developing content-area literacy in science, social studies and technical subjects.

2. Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project in English/Language Arts has created curriculum maps to translate the CCS for K-12.

3. Based on the Fordham Institute Study of Common Core Standards (State of the State Standards – and the Common Core in 2010) the Common Core Standards are more rigorous than a majority of state's standards (37 states).

8. What are key points to remember about the Common Core for English Language Arts/Literacy?

- Standards support a balance of literacy and informational texts
- Standards emphasize text complexity, canonical texts, and text evidence in K-12
- Language standards include vocabulary, with an emphasis on academic vocabulary
- History/social studies, science and media/technology are integrated
- Emphasis on multiple texts and critical/evaluative reading

9. What's happening with the Common Core in Mathematics?

1. The following are the areas that have surfaced as leading considerations/factors with the Common Core and Mathematics.

- Shifting from mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum: Deepen understanding of the most critical key topics at each grade level.
- Coherent progression: Further enhance mastery of these key grade level topics through coherent progressions across grade levels.
- Conceptual understanding and procedural fluency: Strike a balance between building conceptual understanding while increasing procedural fluency.
- Foster reasoning and sense-making in mathematics: Encourage the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills students need to be successful 21st century thinkers.

2. Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project in English/Language Arts has created curriculum maps to translate the CCS for K-12.

3. Based on the Fordham Institute Study of Common Core Standards (State of the State Standards – and the Common Core in 2010) the Common Core Standards are more rigorous than a majority of state's standards (37 states).

10. What are key points to remember about the Common Core for Mathematics?

- Focus and coherence: standards focus on key topics at each grade level and coherent progressions across grade levels
- Balance of concepts and skills: Standards require both conceptual understanding and procedural fluency
- Mathematical practices: Standards foster reasoning and sense-making in mathematics
- College and career readiness: Standards are ambitious but achievable

Important Note: What the Common Core Standards do NOT define:

- How teachers should teach
- All that can or should be taught
- The nature of advanced work beyond the common core
- Interventions needed for students well below grade level
- Full range of support for English Language Learners
- Full range of support for students with special needs

More about The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)

Overview of CCSSI

As a collaborative effort led by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief School Officers with partners and leaders across education and business, the Common Core State Standards Initiative aimed to establish a shared set of clear educational standards for English language arts and mathematics that states can voluntarily adopt. The effort addresses the uneven patchwork of standards that has resulted in differing expectations among schools, districts, and states and has left many students unprepared for work or college. These standards are intended to provide a clear and consistent framework, internationally benchmarked, of what students need to know in order to be competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

National Governors Association (NGA): Founded in 1908, the National Governors Association (NGA) is the collective voice of the nation's governors and one of Washington, D.C.'s most respected public policy organizations. Its members are the governors of the 50 states, three territories, and two commonwealths.

Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in the states, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and five U.S. extra-state jurisdictions.

(From PTA Takes Action: Educating and Training Parents to Support Education Reform/FAQs.)

In 2009, governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states (Texas and Alaska did not participate), two territories, and the District of Columbia committed to developing a Common Core of state standards for English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12.

Common Core of State Standards for English-Language Arts and Mathematics K-12

As a result of this initiative (CCSSI), the Common Core was created: a set of standards for grades K-12 English-language arts and mathematics was 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 intention of the CCSS is heavily placed upon developing this clear understanding of what is expected of students by identifying the specific learning outcomes of what it means for a student to be college and career ready.

Several drafts generated more than 10,000 comments used to refine the standards, released in final form in June 2010. Designed by a diverse group of teachers, higher education representative, state leaders, and subject matter experts, they propose to reflect both aspirations for our children and the realities of the classroom.

"The standards in reading and math were developed to meet 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 set by states"

(From <http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions>)

While the emphasis of the CCSS is upon the identification of learning outcomes in reading, writing, speaking and listening; the intention is that a concentrated effort be placed upon developing content-area literacy in science, social studies, and technical subjects. The framework clearly states that the interdisciplinary approach to literacy comes from "extensive research establishing the need for college and career ready students to be proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas. Most of the

required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content; postsecondary education programs typically provide students with both a higher volume of such reading than is generally required in K–12 schools and comparatively little scaffolding.” As such, the CCSS outline Reading/ELA standards, as well as standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects.

(From http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

District/State Participation in Adoption the Common Core Standards

“In 2009, governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia committed to developing a Common Core of state standards for English-language arts and mathematics for grades K–12.” (From *NGA and CCSSO Comment on CCSSI Governance Suggestions*.) To date, 40 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards and are in the process of aligning state assessments, curriculum and classroom practices to integrate the new standards. Two states (WA, ID) have provisionally approved the standards pending a decision to formally adopt and two (AZ, NM) are reported to have adopted the standards but have not issued any formal announcement. Of the remaining, Alaska, Texas, and Virginia have made it known that they do not plan to adopt the standards.

(From *Common Core Standards Adoption by State* and www.corestandards.org; and ASCD, <http://www.ascd.org/public-policy/common-core-standards.aspx>)

The Common Core Standards and Race to the Top

“While states voluntarily agreed to participate in the process, the effort gained a great deal of momentum when the Obama Administration included participation in the Common Core as an eligibility criterion for many of the programs created out of the \$110 billion stimulus funds. Programs such as Race to the Top rewarded states that not only participated in developing the Common Core, but also adopted them.”

(From *Education Insider: Common Core Standards and Assessment Coalitions: Whiteboard Advisors*)

How the Common Core Standards Compare to Current State Standards

A recent study by the Fordham Institute, a Washington research-and-advocacy group, concludes that the K–12 academic standards in English language arts (ELA) and math produced by the Common Core State Standards Initiative are clearer and more rigorous than today’s ELA standards in 37 states and today’s math standards in 39 states. They also conclude:

- In 33 of those states, the Common Core bests *both* ELA and math standards.
- California, Indiana, and the District of Columbia have ELA standards that they say are clearly superior to those of the Common Core.
- Nearly a dozen states have ELA or math standards in the same league as Common Core in that the existing standards are similar enough to the proposed Common Core standards that it was impossible to say which were better.

(From *The State of State Standards—and the Common Core—in 2010*/Fordham Institute)

States that adopt the standards are allowed to have additional standards, as long as the Common Core represents at least 85 percent of their English and mathematics standards.

Assessing the Common Core Standards

A significant piece of the CCSSI is the adoption of a common (or comparable) assessment system across the participating states. Supported through \$330 million in funding from the ARRA, the Administration held a number of hearings to develop a competition to fund next generation assessment systems aligned to the standards. This competition resulted in two assessment consortia who would lead development efforts for a common assessment of the Common Core Standards.

(From *Educator Insider: Whiteboard Advisor*)

Two Assessment Consortia Lead Development Efforts: PARCC and SMARTER Balanced

Both consortia say that they will combine results from performance-based tasks administered throughout the academic year with a more traditional end-of-the-year measure for school accountability purposes. Both also plan to include year-end assessments, which will be administered via computer. Only the SMARTER Balanced group, however, will use “computer adaptive” technology, which adjusts the difficulty of questions in relation to a student’s responses, as the basis of that year-end test.

PARCC RttT Assessment Consortium

Twenty-six states have joined together to create the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC or Partnership). This PARCC RttT Assessment Consortium was awarded \$170 of the \$330 million.

- Approach focuses on computer-based “through course assessments” in each grade, combined with streamlined end of year tests, including performance tasks.
- Goal is to create an assessment system and supporting tools that will help states dramatically increase the number of students who graduate high school ready for college and careers.
- They intend to provide students, parents, teachers and policymakers with the tools they need to help students (grades 3-8) stay on track to graduate prepared.
- Formative tools will be developed for grades K-2.
- Timeline calls for developing pilot tests by 2011–12 with field-testing in 2012–13 and 2013–14 and full implementation by 2014–15.

(From <http://www.achieve.org/PARCC>)

SMARTER Balanced Consortium (SBAC)

“A second consortium, The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), is a collection of 30 states that have been working collaboratively since December 2009 to develop a student assessment system aligned to a Common Core of academic content standards. The SBAC was awarded a four-year \$176 million Race to the Top assessment grant by the US Department of Education (USED) to develop a student assessment system aligned to a Common Core of academic standards.”

(From OSPI SBAC <http://www.k12.wa.us/smarter/>)

- The system promises to include rigorous, internationally benchmarked tests that report on how each student has been progressing toward and is currently performing on a pathway to career and college readiness.
- The tests will measure the full range of the Common Core standards in grades 3-8 and 11, including assessing problem solving and complex thinking skills.”

(From NC Public Schools News Release Sept 3, 2010: <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/newsroom/news/2010-11/20100903-01/>)

- Educators will be able to access a reporting system that identifies each student’s strengths and weaknesses and monitors progress toward college and career readiness.
- The scores can also be used to improve educator accountability and help identify professional development needs of teachers and principals.
- The online system, designed using “open source” technology, will include:
 - required summative exams (offered twice each school year)
 - optional formative (benchmark) exams
 - a variety of tools, processes, and practices for teachers to use in planning and implementing informal, ongoing assessment to inform and adjust instruction accordingly.

(From <http://www.k12.wa.us/smarter/PressReleases/RTTTAssessmentGrant.aspx>)

Implementing the Common Core Standards: An Overview

All states are active in determining how best to align to the Common Core and integrate curriculum and instructional activities in sync with the standards as described in this brief.

In Ohio, for example, an online portal was launched, “through which teachers can access model curriculum and lesson plans for the common standards. Stan Heffner, the state’s associate superintendent for curriculum and assessment, said the system includes explanations of each standard, suggested instructional strategies, and descriptions of what students’ work should look like if it meets the standards.

In a pilot that begins this fall in NYC, 1,000 teachers in 100 schools in New York City will receive intensive training and support to help them align curriculum to the common standards, learn to measure and apply the “text complexity” that the standards demand, and devise performance-based assessments for the standards.

The Council of the Great City Schools, which represents 65 of the nation’s largest districts, is working with Achieve and the American Federation of Teachers to determine the best way to help school systems “unpack” the standards to help clarify their intent.” (*From Curriculum Producers Work to Reflect Common Standards Nov 2010 EdWeek*)

As these initiatives move into the next phase leading to implementation, “a number of critical questions still remain around how these systems will be adopted and ultimately implemented. For instance:

- Who will exercise authority over setting the cut scores?
- What entity will be responsible for “upkeep” of the standards/assessments going forward?
- How will the information be used as part of accountability systems?
- Will the absence of the financial incentive for those states that were not awarded grants in the RttT competition hinder the deployment of the CC in their states?”

(*From Educator Insider: Whiteboard Advisor*)

State and District Implementation Plans

States and districts are unsure what the true cost of implementing Common Core will be and worry that the money needed will not be available in state or federal budgets. The recession and widespread budget cuts can adversely affect efforts to implement. States adopting these standards must be prepared to implement strategies and support as these will soon become the basis on which students are judged.

Funding and Implementation Timelines

Each state adopting the Common Core, either directly or by fully aligning its state standards, must begin assessments of the new standards within a three-year timeline. As states create implementation schedules, budget arises as the most mitigating factor.

One such example is California. The California Department of Education (CDE) internally estimates that the average cost of developing and publishing a curriculum framework is approximately \$1.2 million. The average cost of a major instructional materials adoption in mathematics or reading/language arts–English language development is approximately \$2.1 million.

According to a recent report on the state site, as the CDE begins to consider curriculum framework development and instructional materials adoptions, budget restrictions create two distinct implementation timelines. The timelines will be dependent on actions by the Legislature to authorize and fund implementation-related activities. Noteworthy is that current statute (EC Section 60200.7) restricts the SBE from taking actions related to the development of curriculum frameworks and the adoption of instructional materials through July 1, 2013. If no legislative action is taken to lift the suspension, the soonest that a framework could be presented to the SBE for action would be 2015 with an instructional materials adoption in 2017.

(*From Common Core State Standards: Development of an Implementation Plan www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/pn/documents/ccorectcsbemeeting.doc*)

Budget Implications

As states plan implementations, they must consider a large range of budget implications, such as

- What are critical areas the state needs to support to implement successfully?
- What funds to local systems can be directed to support CCSS implementation?
- What funding streams are available to support teacher professional development (PD)? What alternatives are there to face-to-face professional training? Can they provide a cost benefit?
- Are there opportunities to partner with neighboring states or regionally?
- What funding can be used for curricular materials and resources development?
- How will the CCSS impact assessment costs?

(*From Leveraging State Budget and Funding to Support Implementations of the Common Core Standards, Achieve.com Aug 2010*)

Implementation Plans

Overall, the majority of states are already formulating steps for full implementations within the next three years by creating and rolling out plans for:

- Developing research-based practices using Common Core
- Developing teacher training and PD
- Researching and aligning instructional material
- Investigating formative and summative assessments to be used before or instead of rollout of common assessments

The Role of Federal Government in the Common Core

While the federal government has had no role in the development of the Common Core state standards, according to the CCSSI, the federal government may have the opportunity to support states as they begin adopting the standards.

For example, the federal government may:

- **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.

(From <http://www.corestandards.org/frequently-asked-questions>)

How Industry and Others are Responding to the Common Core Standards

"While the Common Core standards have been finalized, in reality they constitute a set of pen-and-paper frameworks around which to design curriculum. Incorporating them into product and curriculums across the country will be widespread to interpretation."

(From Moving Forward With the Common Core Nov 2010 Ed Week).

At present, there are already many efforts underway to integrate standards, modify instructional material, and implement assessment systems. Some are presented below.

Curriculum Mapping Project in English Language Arts

Common Core Inc.'s Curriculum Mapping Project in English Language Arts translated the new Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten through 12th grade into unit maps that teachers can use (free) to plan their year, craft their own more detailed curriculum, and create lesson plans. The maps were written by teachers and claim to be flexible and adaptable, while addressing every standard in the CCSS. Note: Common Core Inc. is an independent company, not part of the Common Core Standard Initiative.

(From <http://www.commoncore.org/maps/>)

Common Core Standards and Math: A Math Taskforce

A joint task force representing the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators (AMTE), the Association of State Supervisors of Mathematics (ASSM), the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) was formed to develop actions and resources needed to help teachers implement the Common Core State Standards in Mathematics (CCSSM). The task force also considered ways in which the organizations can collaborate in supporting their members and various groups to advance each organization's vision of school mathematics. The joint task force report, which has been shared with the leadership of each organization, identifies five priority actions to be taken as soon as possible. The five priority actions center on organizing, research and planning for the implementation of the Common Core; defining assessment practices in sync with the two Common Core assessment consortia; and identifying professional development practices.

(From NCTM.org http://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/About_NCTM/President/Messages/Shughnessy/2010_1104_PresMess_A.pdf)

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

As many people work to design curriculum and instructional materials for the common standards, the chief challenges are to maintain the project's focus on fewer, clearer, and higher standards and to ensure high-quality materials, according to Carina Wong, who oversees college-readiness grants at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The philanthropy awarded \$19 million in grants for development of such materials in February and expects to award another round by early next year. They were involved in drafting, evaluating, and winning support for the standards.

(From Curriculum Producers Work to Reflect Common Standards Nov 2010 EdWeek)

"The Foundation adds that the Common Core will become useful to teachers and policy makers only when it's part of a larger system of next-generation assessments that track how much students know and how well they know it. The Gates Foundation will spend an estimated \$354 million between 2010 and 2014 to:

- Help states build a framework that could be the foundation for a common proficiency conversation.
- Develop syllabi that lay out a course that connects the standards, assessments, and instruction but depends on teachers using their own creativity in the classroom.
- Seed new intermediaries for validation and item bank development and designing new models of professional development.
- Develop specifications for new technology-based instructional platforms that would help states deliver high-quality assessments aligned to the core standards and help districts acquire time-relevant data to improve instruction.
- Develop new ways of thinking about psychometric rules that guide tests in order to get higher quality and more valid items that can be used for large-scale assessment and accountability systems.
- Develop new scoring technology and new forms of diagnostic assessments.
- Explore how to support student academic success, build their academic tenacity, and surround them with responsive education environments."

(From Tying Together the Common Core of Standards, Instruction, and Assessments www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v91/docs/k1002phi.pdf)

McGraw-Hill Education and the Common Core State Standards

McGraw-Hill Education, with its long history of providing the highest-quality language arts and literacy materials for educators, supports the Common Core Standards Initiative. McGraw-Hill Education has the experts and expertise in the instruction and assessment to help implement the Common Core Standards in a credible way.

- McGraw-Hill Education is an endorsing partner of the NGA/CCSSO common core initiative
- McGraw-Hill Education supports the goal of producing a common core of voluntary state standards that are aligned with college and career expectation and that are reflective of cross-disciplinary skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- McGraw-Hill Education's formative testing capabilities will empower teachers to use data to guide student learning of common standards. Our summative assessment practice provides credible, independent measures of achievement that will support a new era of accountability. Our test development capabilities — from content creation through research and validation, to technology-enhanced delivery and reporting — are available to provide the valid and reliable measurement of student mastery of common core standards.
- McGraw-Hill Education employs psychometricians, technologists, and curriculum and pedagogical experts. Together with our authors, they are deeply immersed in the latest research and developments concerning education reform.
- McGraw-Hill has a variety of instructional programs for K-12 reading and math that fully meet the Common Core State Standards. For more information visit www.mheonline.com.



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McGraw Hill's Center for Comprehensive School Improvement (CCSI) brings together all of McGraw-Hill's educational expertise and resources to help districts drive student achievement, especially for students most at risk. To find out about our assessment and intervention programs as well as our onsite and online professional development offerings visit www.mheccsi.com

