

## Common Core State Standards Initiative

### OVERVIEW

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is an effort designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of consistent, voluntary, internationally-benchmarked academic standards in mathematics and English language arts.

Currently, every state has its own standards, which has resulted in varied expectations and levels of academic rigor that are largely dependent on geography. Common core state standards are a first step to leveling the playing field to allow for equal access to an excellent education for all children.

As the nation's largest volunteer child advocacy association with over five million members who are parents, students, and teachers, the National Parent Teacher Association® (PTA®) is uniquely positioned to be an influential and credible voice in advancing the common core state standards. Since its founding in 1897, PTA has worked toward its vision of making every child's potential a reality. Ensuring high academic expectations for all students, regardless of their zip code, is aligned with PTA's public policy priority of equity and opportunity for every child.

### BACKGROUND

The CCSSI is a joint effort led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop a common core of K-12 standards in English language arts and mathematics. The aim of this state-led initiative is to develop internationally-benchmarked standards that are aligned with college and work expectations.

States will develop and adopt the standards through a collaborative process. First, a group of leading academic experts, including Achieve, ACT, and the College Board, drafted college and career ready standards that detailed expectations for what students should know and be able to do upon high school graduation. The college and career ready standards were released for public comment in early fall 2009. Those standards were used to develop corresponding K-12 standards that set expectations by grade level.

States are being asked to adopt the standards based on their own timeline and context.<sup>1</sup> States will have a great deal of flexibility when adopting the standards, which are not connected to any federal mandate, high-stakes assessment, or national curriculum. Rather, the common core standards establish clear expectations for what all students should know, and allow states to determine the best way for their students to reach these academic goals and achieve college and career success.

### WHY COMMON CORE STANDARDS ARE IMPORTANT TO PARENTS

- 1) Consistent and clear standards prepare students for college, career, and citizenship.

Currently, each state has its own set of academic standards for students, which has led to wide-ranging expectations of what students should be able to learn and do before they graduate from high school. Several researchers have found that state standards and assessments are neither consistent across states nor aligned to college and workplace demands.<sup>2</sup> These inconsistencies present a challenge for parents trying to

ensure their children are successful in college and career.

Because current state standards and curriculum are not aligned to college and work expectations, students who are now entering college often begin their postsecondary education unprepared. American college students' need for remedial classes results in them not graduating from college on time and places an increased financial burden on parents and students. The Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that it costs \$1.4 billion to provide remedial education to students who have recently completed high school, \$283 million goes to the cost of tuition alone.<sup>3</sup>

Common core standards will ensure that all students are held to consistent expectations that will prepare them for college and career.

- 2) Clear, consistent standards equip parents to understand and support what their children should learn and know.

**A recent study by ACT found that only 23 percent of high school graduates were likely to earn at least a "C" or higher in first-year college courses.**

Because states' standards are often overly complicated, vague, and inaccessible, parents may lack an understanding of what their children should be learning in school and how they can support learning at home. Current standards in several states are often hundreds of pages long, have complicated codes and descriptions, and lack continuity between grade levels—making them difficult for parents to decipher.

Common core standards provide parents with clear expectations for what their children should be able to know and do when they graduate high school or advance to a particular grade-level, allowing them to engage more fully in the education of their children. Their engagement raises student achievement, improves behavior and attendance, decreases drop-

out rates, and improves the emotional and physical well-being of children.<sup>4</sup> Common core standards help parents hold their schools accountable for providing high-quality, standards-aligned instruction. Moreover, if parents know and understand the academic material their children are learning at school, they can further support and reinforce learning at home.

Common core standards that are consistent across states allow families that move from one part of the country to another to have the same expectations for what their child will learn in another school. The movement of students between states presents a number of challenges for students, families, and schools. According to a study conducted by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, one out of six children has attended three or more schools by the end of the third grade.<sup>5</sup>

When these students and families enter a new school, they must adjust to new classmates, teachers, and behavioral and academic expectations. In the absence of consistent standards, students in the same grade level in different states are expected to meet objectives of varied difficulty and content. For example, California mathematics standards require fourth graders to identify and determine prime numbers, while Arizona fourth grade mathematics standards do not explicitly require students to learn about prime numbers.<sup>6</sup> Through no fault of their own, students may be entering a new school academically unprepared, and teachers and parents need to spend additional time and resources helping students catch up.

Common core standards provide consistency for parents and students during transitions and allow parents to continue to support student learning and hold their school accountable, regardless of changes in zip code.

- 3) Curriculum, assessments, and professional development aligned to clear standards will prepare and support teachers so that they can be effective in the classroom.

CODE	GRADE 4 BENCHMARKS
4.1.1	Students use the concept of place value to read and write whole numbers up to 999,999 in words, standard, and expanded form.
4.1.2	Students compare and order whole numbers.
4.1.3	Students use coins and bills to compare the values, make combinations up to \$10.00, and make change from amounts up to \$5.00.
4.1.4	Students demonstrate computational fluency with basic facts (add to 20, subtract from 20, multiply by 0-10).
4.1.5	Students add and subtract to thousands and multiply hundreds by a single digit.
4.1.6	Students explain their choice of problem-solving strategies and justify their results when performing whole number operations in problem-solving situations.

*This is an excerpt from one state's mathematics standards. The full standards are over 70 pages long and contain complicated explanations of each code.*

Adopting common standards will help improve teacher effectiveness by providing clear expectations for what students in each grade level need to learn. Currently, the variation in standards across states makes it difficult to prepare new teachers to deliver standards-based instruction and create aligned activities and assessments. Common core standards will allow teachers to more easily determine if a curriculum would adequately prepare students for college and career, and also make it easier for teachers to design assessments that measure student progress in meaningful and accurate ways.

Common core standards will also help states train and support highly effective teachers. Once a critical mass of states adopts the standards, states will have the opportunity to develop collaborative tools, professional development, assessments, and curriculum. For example, states and institutions of higher education

could align teacher preparation and professional development to the common standards so teachers could enter a classroom anywhere in the nation knowing what to teach and how to assess student mastery. Rather than having to adopt a different curriculum for different states, teachers would have access to a curriculum aligned to consistent standards that prepare students for college and the workforce. Moreover, while these standards outline what students need to learn, it would still be up to schools and teachers, using the additional tools provided, to decide how to best help students reach these standards.

- 4) Internationally-benchmarked standards will guarantee that all our nation's students are able to compete in a globally competitive workforce.

The United States can no longer claim widespread educational success. Once the global leader in education, the United States has fallen behind other industrialized nations in both math and science.<sup>7</sup> Further, out of 100 students who begin 9th grade in U.S. schools, only 19 will graduate from high school, go directly to college, and graduate within six years.<sup>8</sup>

**A recent report by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics revealed that the literacy scores of America's fourth graders rank 11th among industrialized nations.**

It is critical to our nation's future success that our students graduate high school prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. Holding our students to internationally-benchmarked standards is not only a crucial step in closing our nation's achievement gap, but also an assurance that they will be able to compete in an increasingly global society and workforce.

- 5) Common core standards ensure that all students—regardless of income or geography—have the opportunity to engage in equally challenging work

Because standards differ from states to state, students are held to different academic expectations, largely based on geography. Student scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that student proficiency is widely divergent from state to state. In a state-by-state comparison of 2005 NAEP 4th grade reading scores, more than half of the states in the nation scored about one grade level below the highest scoring state of Massachusetts.<sup>9</sup> A recent review of NAEP scores found that the states with the lowest NAEP proficiency rates have at least 20% of children living in poverty.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Over one million students drop out of high school every year, with a disproportional effect on minority students—almost half of Hispanic and African American students are not graduating.<sup>12</sup>

Having consistent standards will also ensure that all students are held to high expectations. Without consistent standards, students—particularly those growing up in low-income communities—are less likely to receive creative, challenging work. The example below illustrates the vastly different expectations for students in high income and low income communities.

The difference in our education system's expectations for these two groups of students demonstrates the need for higher, clearer standards that reflect consistent expectations for all students.

Common core standards are a first step in leveling the playing field to ensure that all students, regardless of geography, are held to the same high expectations and have the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

## SAME TOPIC: ODYSSEY      SAME GRADE: NINTH      SAME STATE: CALIFORNIA

### DIFFERENT ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS AND ASSIGNMENTS

#### High Income School

By nature, humans compare and contrast all elements of their world. Why? Because in the juxtaposition of two different things, one can learn more about each individual thing as well as something about the universal nature of the things being compared.

For this **2-3 page comparison/contrast paper** ask yourself: what larger ideas do you see working in Homer's The Odyssey and "O Brother Where Art Thou?" Do both works treat these issues in the same way? **What do the similarities and differences between the works reveal about the underlying nature of the larger idea?**

#### Lower income school

Divide class into 3 groups:

**Group 1 designs a brochure titled "Odyssey Cruises."** The students listen to the story and write down all the places Odysseus visited in his adventures, and list the cost to travel from place to place.

**Group 2 draws pictures of each adventure.**

**Group 3 takes the names of the characters in the story and gods and goddesses in the story and designs a crossword puzzle.**

Source: Russlyn Ali, Education Trust, 2007

## RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information on National PTA's recommendations on CCSSI refer to National PTA's annual Public Policy Agenda. Available online at: [http://www.pta.org/public\\_policy\\_agenda.asp](http://www.pta.org/public_policy_agenda.asp)

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## (Endnotes)

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9. E. Rocha and C. D. Brown, *The Case for National Standards, Accountability, and Fiscal Equity* (Washington, D.C.: Center for American Progress, 2005).

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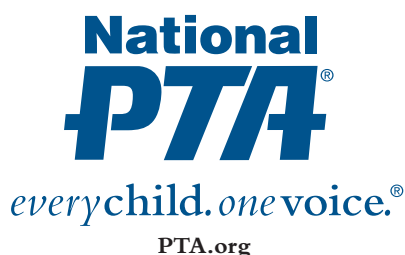
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## About National PTA®

Founded in 1897, the National Parent Teacher Association® (PTA) is comprised of more than five million members, including parents, students, educators, school administrators, and community leaders. With more than 25,000 local units, PTA flourishes in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Department of Defense schools in Europe and the Pacific.

As the oldest and largest volunteer child advocacy association in the United States, PTA's legacy of influencing federal policy to protect the education, health, and overall well-being of children has made an indelible impact in the lives of millions of children and families. Visit [PTA.org](http://PTA.org) for more information.



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