

Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards

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A series published by Education Northwest to keep regional stakeholders informed about the Common Core initiative



WHAT DO TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW?

What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) represent a coherent progression of learning expectations in English language arts and mathematics designed to prepare K–12 students for college and career success. The standards define the knowledge and skills students should have in their K–12 education, emphasize learning goals, describe end-of-year expectations, and focus on results, leaving room for teachers to determine how these learning goals should be achieved.



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How were the standards developed?

The CCSS effort was launched in June, 2009, through a partnership of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). State leaders in the two organizations developed the CCSS, together with parents, teachers, school administrators, and experts from across the country. Both national and international research and evidence informed development of the standards. After public comment, the final version of the CCSS was released in June 2010.

What are the benefits for teachers of common standards?

- While most states already have English language arts and mathematics standards in place, they vary widely in their coverage and level of rigor. The CCSS clearly communicate what is expected of students at each grade level, with students, parents, and teachers, and school administrators all on the same page and collectively working toward shared goals. A common set of standards ensures that all students, no matter where they live, can graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and careers.

The Common Core State Standards:

- Are aligned with college and work expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build on strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by other top-performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

Source: <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards>

- Because the CCSS will be consistent from school to school among states choosing to adopt the standards, if teachers transfer to different states, districts, or schools, they will have some assurance that learning expectations will be the same. Common goals will also enable

continued on page 4

A Closer Look at the Common Core State Standards for **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

In English language arts (ELA), required content includes classic myths and stories, America's founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Additional subject matter remains in the purview of states and local education agencies. The CCSS also require that students learn about literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Organization of the Standards

ELA standards include three sections: a comprehensive K–5 section and two content area-specific sections for grades 6–12 (one for ELA and one for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects).

Each section is divided into strands: K–5 and 6–12 ELA have Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands; the 6–12 history/social studies, science, and technical subjects section focuses on Reading and Writing.

Each strand is headed by a strand-specific set of College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards that is identical across all grades and content areas. Individual grade-level standards are defined in K–8; the standards use two-year bands in grades 9–12 to provide flexibility for local educators in high school course design. The CCR and grade-specific standards are necessary complements—the former providing broad standards, the latter providing additional specificity. Together they define the skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate.

Key Features of the Standards

Reading: Text complexity and growth of comprehension

The Reading standards place equal emphasis on the sophistication of what students read and the skill with which they read.

Writing: Text types, responding to reading, and research

The Writing standards acknowledge the fact that whereas some writing skills, such as the ability to plan, revise, edit, and publish, are applicable to many types of writing, other skills are more properly defined in terms of specific writing types: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives.

Speaking and Listening: Flexible communication and collaboration

Including but not limited to skills necessary for formal presentations, the Speaking and Listening standards require students to develop a range of broadly useful oral communication and interpersonal skills.

Language: Conventions, effective use, and vocabulary

The Language standards include the essential “rules” of standard written and spoken English, but they also approach language as a matter of craft and informed choice among alternatives.

Source: <http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards>

A Closer Look at the Common Core State Standards for **MATHEMATICS**

Standards for Mathematical Practice

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematics begin with eight Standards for Mathematical Practice. These standards describe ways in which students should engage with the content, processes, and proficiencies of longstanding importance in mathematics. They apply across all of the grades, K–12.

Standards for Mathematical Practice

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning

In grades K–5, the standards provide a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. In grades 6–8, a major emphasis is placed on the study of ratios, proportions, and algebra. In grades 9–12, the standards require students to apply mathematical thinking to real-world problems. Rather than covering a plethora of topics, the CCSS require deep comprehension and the ability to apply mathematics to problems they have not encountered previously.

Standards for Mathematical Content

The standards for mathematical content are designed as learning progressions through the grades and define what students should understand and be able to do in mathematics. For kindergarten through grade 8, there are grade-specific standards. At the high school level, the standards are organized by “conceptual categories.” Each of these sets of standards includes a number of “domains,” which group related standards to provide coherence around key mathematical ideas.

Grades K–8

For kindergarten through grade 8, there are grade-specific standards. Each contains a number of domains including the following:

- Counting and Cardinality
- Operations and Algebraic Thinking
- Number and Operations in Base Ten
- Fractions
- Ratios and Proportional Reasoning
- The Number System
- Expressions and Equations
- Functions
- Measurement and Data
- Geometry
- Statistics and Probability

Grades 9–12

The standards at the high-school level outline the mathematics expected of all students in order to be prepared for college and a career. They also include additional mathematics for students who choose to take advanced level courses. The high school standards are organized by “conceptual categories,” each providing a “coherent view of high school mathematics.” These include:

- Number and Quantity
- Algebra
- Functions
- Modeling
- Geometry
- Statistics and Probability

teachers who are moving between schools to more easily understand learning benchmarks for their students. Similar transitions for students should also be much smoother with CCSS.

- The standards focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures at each grade level, providing teachers with the necessary time to teach these concepts and procedures well.
- With a successful adoption, states and districts will be able to share experiences and approaches, which may increase the capacity of all schools to teach their students to higher standards.

How will the standards be assessed?

Two consortia of states—the Washington-based SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium and Achieve's Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers—have received Race to the Top funding to begin designing both summative and formative assessments that can be used by states adopting the CCSS. These assessments are expected to be available during the 2014–2015 school year. Assessment comparisons will become easier among states with common assessments: Students who achieve proficiency in one state should also meet proficiency in another.

When will the CCSS be implemented?

The CCSS are *not* national standards, but rather a voluntary, coordinated effort among states to set common expectations for all students. Many states are currently developing implementation plans with timelines and considering how the CCSS align with existing state standards. Alignment analyses are being developed and are available on many state departments of education websites. Most plans will include professional development for school and district staff before and throughout implementation, until the CCSS assessments become available in 2014.

How can Education Northwest assist educators and policymakers?

Education Northwest, founded in 1966 as Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, works with schools, districts, and communities on comprehensive, research-based solutions to the challenges they face. Four priorities frame our work: supporting educators; strengthening schools and districts; engaging families and communities; and conducting research, evaluation, and assessment.

The CCSS team at Education Northwest is committed to providing stakeholders with accurate and timely information, high-quality resources, and useful services that will help states in their efforts to adopt the standards. Our CCSS website, <http://educationnorthwest.org/common-core/>, is a clearinghouse for information and resources tailored to Northwest educators at the local and state levels as well as to policymakers and others interested in the CCSS.

Education Northwest offers professional development services in mathematics and writing that are aligned with the CCSS. For more information about these services, contact Kit Peixotto at 503.275.9594.

For more about the Common Core State Standards, visit <http://educationnorthwest.org/common-core/>.

What Can Teachers Do Now To Prepare for CCSS Implementation?

Form a professional learning community and begin by reading the CCSS for your grade level and in your subject area. Consider these questions:

- How do your current state standards compare with the CCSS? Which standards are similar? Which standards appear at a grade level above or below your state's standards? Which standards are new?
- How do your classroom, end-of course, and/or formative assessments align with the learning expectations outlined in the CCSS?
- How do your curriculum and instructional materials align with the CCSS? Will you need to develop new lessons and units?
- How will adoption of the new CCSS impact your work? What supports will you need to help students learn the knowledge and skills in the standards?