

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Common Core State Standards

Overview

Q: What are the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

A: The Common Core State Standards are a single set of clear educational standards for prekindergarten through 12th grade in English/language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt (Maryland adopted the CCSS in 2010). The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce. The CCSS also promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the U.S. and abroad. More than any other standards that preceded them, the CCSS are relevant to the real world, focusing on the knowledge and skills that students will need to be successful after high school graduation.

Q: What are educational standards?

A: Educational standards define expectations about what students should know and what skills students should be able to demonstrate at any given point in their education. Standards are developed by subject (or content), such as mathematics. For example, a teacher will know exactly what standards a fourth grade student should master after a unit on fractions. Standards are the foundation for a curriculum. A curriculum defines the courses, content, and sequence that should be taught in order for a student to achieve mastery of the standards.

Q: What standards did Maryland use before the Common Core State Standards?

A: Prior to the Common Core, Maryland – like all other U.S. states – developed its own unique set of standards. Maryland’s standards aligned with the State-mandated assessments, called the Maryland School Assessments (MSA), and enabled Maryland to comply with federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

Q: Now that Maryland has new educational standards, will the State have a new curriculum as well?

A: Yes. After adopting the CCSS in 2010, Maryland launched a broad-based, year-long process to revise its curriculum to align with the new standards. Hundreds of classroom educators, instructional leaders, administrators, and higher education representatives helped State officials develop the new Maryland Common Core State Curriculum.

Development

Q: Who developed the Common Core State Standards?

A: The Common Core State Standards were developed by a multi-state initiative coordinated by the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). In addition, teachers, parents, schools administrators, and education experts from across the country, together with state leaders, provided input into the development of the standards.

The Common Core State Standards were written by building on the best and highest state standards in existence in the U.S., examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world, and careful study of the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do in order to be successful in college and careers.

Q: Was the federal government involved in the development of the Common Core State Standards?

A: No. Although the Common Core establishes a common set of rigorous standards for all participating states, the CCSS are not a federal initiative and the federal government was not involved in their development. Adopting the state-initiated Common Core was a voluntary decision made by individual states. Moreover, the Common Core initiative is a non-partisan effort.

Q: Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?

A: Yes. Teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. The Common Core State Standards 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.

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

A: There are no data collection requirements for states that have adopted the CCSS. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the CCSS does not require data collection. The means of assessing students and the data that results from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and unique from the CCSS.

Implementation and Future Work

Q: When will the Common Core be fully implemented in Maryland public schools?

A: In all Maryland public schools, full implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the Maryland Common Core State Curriculum will begin in the 2013-2014 school year.

Q: Will there be tests based on the Common Core State Standards?

A: Yes. States that adopted the CCSS are currently collaborating to develop common assessments that will be aligned to the standards and replace existing end of year state assessments. Maryland is part of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), a consortium of states working together to develop a common set of CCSS-aligned tests. The PARCC assessments will test writing skills in each grade, as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills. These assessments will be available in the 2014-2015 school year.

Q: What do the new standards mean for our teachers?

A: The CCSS have established what all students should know and do, however, the standards do not dictate how teachers should teach their students. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

In addition to shifting the focus from high school completion to college and career readiness, from more topics with less depth of knowledge to fewer topics with more depth of knowledge, and from demonstrating knowledge through recall to demonstrating knowledge through application and higher order thinking skills, teachers will be required to increase vertical articulation – becoming familiar with what students have learned in the grade prior and what students will need to learn in the grade after their own. As important, all teachers will strengthen their understanding of what college and career readiness means for students in Maryland public schools.

Q: Are Maryland teachers prepared for the transition to the CCSS and new Maryland Common Core State Curriculum?

A: Yes, Maryland’s public school teachers are prepared. Teacher and principal teams from every school in the State have been participating in Educator Effectiveness Academies (EEA), which were held in the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2013, with follow-up sessions provided during the school year. The Academies focused on the CCSS and the Maryland Common Core State Curriculum, and provided teachers and principals with the tools to implement the new standards and curriculum in their schools. Based on their learning from the Academies, EEA teams are providing professional development to all teachers back in their home schools.

Content and Quality of the Standards

Q: If Maryland is already a national leader in education, why did the State adopt these new standards?

A: Even though Maryland has been ranked #1 for providing high-quality public education for five consecutive years, the Common Core was adopted because the new standards provide:

- Alignment with expectations for college and career;
- Clarity and consistency across all participating states;
- Higher-order skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving;
- An emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Science (STEM);
- Knowledge and skills that align with the career pathways that employers are seeking;
- Increased global competitiveness for our students; and
- Reality-based instruction that is practical for the classroom.

Top-performing states, like Maryland, will be challenged to achieve higher levels of performance – those that demonstrate increased college and career readiness. No state in the country was asked to lower their expectations for their students in adopting the Common Core. In addition, states and local schools systems have not lost their autonomy for how they teach the CCSS and how they meet the needs of each individual child.

Q: How will the CCSS benefit our students in English/language arts and mathematics, as well as in other content areas?

A: The Common Core State Standards – which require collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving – are designed to support a student’s ability to apply more demanding concepts to real-world situations that simulate the type of work they may do in the future. Students will cover fewer topics in a grade level, however, they will be exposed to content in much greater depth. The standards also call for the following shifts in learning and instruction in English/language arts, mathematics, and other content areas:

English/language arts (as well as other content areas)

- Build knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts in addition to literature
- Reading and writing grounded in evidence from the text
- Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary

Mathematics (as well as other content areas)

- Focus intensely on two or three topics in each grade
- Concepts logically connected from one grade to the next and linked to other major topics within the grade
- Fluency with arithmetic, application of knowledge to real world situations, and deep understanding of mathematical concepts

Q: Do these standards incorporate both content and skills?

A: Yes. In English/language arts, the CCSS require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world; America’s founding documents; foundational American literature; and Shakespeare.

The remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the CCSS require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In mathematics, the CCSS lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals.

Taken together, these elements support a student’s ability to learn and apply more demanding mathematical concepts and procedures. The middle and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world situations and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically.

Q: What does this work mean for students with disabilities and English language learners?

A: The standards will help teachers have more time to cover subjects in greater detail, giving students an opportunity to really understand what is being taught. Specific information on applying the CCSS to English language learners and students with disabilities are also included in the standards. All states will be working together to constantly improve upon these issues, which will result in a strong support system for all learners.