

Common Core Standards Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions

The Michigan Department of Education has developed this document to answer frequent questions regarding the Common Core State Standards Initiative and Michigan's adoption of these standards.

For more information, please visit our Career and College Ready portal and explore the resources under the Effective Instruction or Parent tabs.

The Initiative and the Process

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

A: The Common Core State Standards were developed by states, for states to provide a consistent set of clear K-12 expectations that outline the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics to lead to career- and college-readiness. Prior to the CCSS, every state had their own unique standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn varied widely from state to state.

The CCSS do not represent a curriculum; instead they serve as a framework around which curriculum can be built. This common platform provides states opportunities for providing the necessary curricular resources to local education entities. The standards also support collaboration in building state-of-the-art assessment systems required by school and educator accountability legislation. To date, forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories and many private and parochial schools have adopted the Common Core State Standards.

Q: How do states benefit by adopting the Common Core State Standards?

A: The standards promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with their peers in the United States and abroad.

In addition, they allow educators across the nation to work collaboratively on a range of tools and policies, including the:

- Development of digital media and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually that will replace existing state testing systems; and
- Changes needed to support educators and schools.

Q: Who developed these standards?

A: The K-12 Common Core State Standards were developed through a state-led initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

Participating states, including Michigan, worked with CCSSO and the NGA Center alongside of a wide range of educators, content experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups. The final standards reflect the invaluable feedback from the general public, teachers, parents, business leaders, states, and content area experts and are informed by the

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standards of other high performing nations. Specifically, the standards were developed, reviewed and revised by groups of experts and K-12 practitioners including:

- A Work Group of early childhood through postsecondary curriculum and assessment experts representing multiple stakeholders from Michigan and across the country.
- A Feedback Group reviewed draft documents and provided expert advice. (Michigan was represented in this group.)
- An Advisory Group consisting of experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education, and the State Higher Education Executive Officers provided additional guidance.
- States and national organizations reviewed and provided evidence-based feedback throughout the process.

Q: Was the federal government involved in this initiative?

A: No. This has been a state-led and state-driven initiative from the beginning. These standards were not developed or mandated by the federal government. State educational leaders signed the memorandum of understanding agreeing to the process before the federal Race to the Top program was announced. The CCSS Initiative is an extension of work begun as a part of the American Diploma Project, in which states agreed to develop career- and college-ready standards, raise graduation rates, and adopt college admissions assessments.

Q: Were teachers involved in the process or the development of the standards?

A: Yes. The American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Council of Teachers of English and other organizations have endorsed and supported this initiative. The American Federation of Teachers also organized groups of teachers to provide specific feedback and comments on the standards during their development. In addition, there were opportunities for teachers to comment on the standards by submitting feedback during the public comment periods.

Q: Are the standards internationally benchmarked?

A: Yes. International benchmarking played a significant role in both the English language arts and mathematics sets of standards.

Q: How do the common core standards compare with Michigan's previous standards in math and English language arts?

A: The CSSS compare favorably with Michigan's Grade Level Content Expectations and High School Content Expectations in math and English language arts. The CCSS-ELA/Literacy describe a shared responsibility for reading, writing, and speaking and listening in all content areas.

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Q: Was there any flexibility in adding to or removing standards from the Common Core State Standards?

A: States participating in the development of the Common Core State Standards gathered input from educators across their state prior to finalizing the standards to determine if the CCSS should be supplemented. Because of the close alignment with Michigan's existing Grade Level Content Expectations and High School Content Expectations, the standards were adopted by the Board as written.

Q: Does having common standards lead to “dumbing down” the standards across the board?

A: 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. 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.

Implementation

Q: When did Michigan adopt the Common Core State Standards?

A: The Common Core State Standards were adopted by the State Board of Education in June 2010. Local districts currently are in the process of implementing the CCSS with full implementation complete by the 2014-15 school year.

Supports also are being provided to local districts from the Michigan Department of Education through Intermediate School Districts and other partners.

Q: How will the Common Core Standards change the way teachers teach?

A: Teachers will continue to determine what curriculum and lesson plans best serve the needs of each classroom and each student. Teachers will undoubtedly make good use of the variety of tools and lesson plans that are available through seminars, workshops, and electronically. Many of these resources have been developed by recognized experts in the field of mathematics and English language arts. As they develop greater understanding of the increased rigor, teachers will make changes to their lesson plans in order to help students deepen their knowledge of a given standard or group of standards.

Q: Are the Common Core Standards expected to improve academic achievement in Michigan?

A: By providing clarity and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country, the standards will influence the improvement of academic achievement and will serve as a platform for building curriculum and lesson plans that are focused and relevant. This will further assist teachers in developing more targeted lessons that allow for the student to more fully develop their knowledge and skills in math and English language arts.

In mathematics, this means teachers will concentrate on teaching a more focused set of major mathematics concepts and skills. (more)

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This will allow students time to master important ideas and skills in a more organized way throughout the year and from one grade to the next. It also will call for teachers to use rich and challenging mathematics content and to engage students in solving real-world problems in order to inspire greater interest in mathematics.

In English language arts and literacy, this means that in addition to stories and literature, students will read more texts that provide facts and background knowledge in areas including science and social studies. They will read more challenging texts and be asked to construct written arguments. There also will be an increased emphasis on building a strong vocabulary so students can read and understand more challenging material.

Q: Who will manage the Common Core State Standards Initiative in the future?

A: The Common Core State Standards Initiative was and will remain a state-led effort. In addition to supporting effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards, NGA and CCSSO are committed to developing a long-term sustainability structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers, and other state policymakers. There will be an ongoing state-led development process that can support continuous improvement of the standards.

Q: Are assessments being developed to measure student progress in learning the standards?

A: Two voluntary consortia of states are developing common assessments – the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC).

These state-led consortia on assessment are 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.

As a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), Michigan is working to develop and transition to a next-generation assessment system. As part of this transition, Michigan is participating in the Spring 2013 SBAC Pilot. There will be two types of schools involved in this pilot: 1) scientifically-selected schools (selected to ensure the pilot assessment is administered to a representative sample of Michigan students) and 2) volunteer schools.

The SBAC will be administered statewide during the spring of 2015. These assessments will replace current state tests in reading, writing and mathematics in grades 3-11, and will provide cross-state, comparable data on student readiness for college and career.

The level of rigor on these tests is likely to be closer to the level of rigor required by the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) than our current state assessments. Because, like NAEP, the new assessments test higher order knowledge and skills and more rigorous content, initial scores likely are to be lower than on most current state tests.