

# Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards

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## WHAT DO DISTRICT ADMINISTRATORS 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.

### How will the CCSS impact state assessments?

The internationally benchmarked K–12 CCSS have been adopted so far by 44 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Most of the states have also committed to work together in one of two consortia to develop a shared assessment system. The Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is building an assessment system that will be anchored by college- and career-ready tests in high school, and will include end-of-year assessments in grades 3–8. In addition, the PARCC system—which will be computer based—will include optional formative tests, starting in kindergarten. The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) intends to develop adaptive, online tests. These will include required summative

exams, combined with performance tasks given throughout the year, and optional formative assessments. The common assessments developed by the two consortia will be fully implemented in 2014–2015.

### What are the implications of the CCSS?

To effectively implement the CCSS and subsequent assessments, key stakeholders must systematically consider what it will take to fully operationalize the standards in every classroom, every year, from kindergarten through high school. In the process, states and districts will face serious decisions about budgets, curricula, assessments, graduation requirements, accountability systems, instructional resources, professional development programs, and more. Districts will be called on to accomplish nothing less than a transformation of school systems, which can be a powerful lever to improve educational outcomes for all students.

### What do district administrators need to do?

The CCSS initiative is aimed at changing what U.S. schools teach and what their students learn in English language arts and mathematics. While standards-based instruction and assessments are nothing new, the CCSS do offer an unprecedented opportunity for collaboration among states and districts around common language and expectations. Many

organizations are working to develop sample implementation plans and time lines, useful professional development opportunities, and other resources. District administrators will need to tap into these many offerings while wearing their “critical consumer” hat.

District administrators must be aware of any guidelines for implementation from their state education agency, but can begin the process of transformation in their schools immediately. To get started, district administrators might consider the following actions:

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“The adoption and implementation of the CCSS is a rare, state-led, student-centered opportunity to improve outcomes throughout the entire educational pipeline and achieve the ultimate goal of academic success for all students.”

Krueger, C. (2011). *The common core state standards: Implications for higher education in the West*. Boulder, CO: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://www.wiche.edu/info/publications/PI-CommonCoreStateStandards.pdf>

### **Draft an implementation plan**

District administrators should assemble a coalition of stakeholders to guide the implementation process. This group of board members, district directors, school administrators, specialists, teachers, and community members will need to consider different implementation options and their rationales. Budget and time line considerations will influence how the implementation will roll out in the district.

Implementation can be staggered by year, content area, pilot schools, or grade span. For example, is it feasible to implement the standards in all grades at once, or more reasonable to begin with one grade span, such as K–2 or 6–8? Some stakeholders might argue that the grade 6–8 cohort will be the first to take the summative career and college assessments when they reach 11th grade in 2014–2015. By concentrating on this span, schools and districts are preparing the first group of students for a high school assessment that may be linked to graduation requirements. Other stakeholders might argue that it's best to begin at K–2 to prepare these students for the assessments through all grade spans.

Other questions that need to be addressed in the implementation plan include: How will the district use formative assessments to ensure teachers are informed about students' progress on the new standards? What is the relevance of any interim assessments currently in use? How will the district develop and implement a new curriculum framework that outlines the scope and sequence for teaching the new standards? And, how will the district approach the need to identify instructional materials that are aligned to the standards?

### **Communicate how the CCSS address equity**

District leaders should explain to the broader community the equity issues underlying the CCSS and related assessments. A clear message should be communicated that rigorous content will be taught throughout elementary, middle, and high school so that every student is equipped to successfully compete with peers across the district, the state, the nation, and the world. The district will need to examine the current achievement of all student subgroups and determine if inequities exist. Likewise, districts must make an explicit commitment to instructional practices that ensure every student has the opportunity to meet the learning goals of the new standards.

Raising standards and expectations is only the first step in raising student achievement. There will be students who arrive at a grade or course not fully prepared, and some students will require more time to meet the higher expectations. District administrators will need to plan potential interventions for these circumstances. For example, the district can consider extended learning opportunities such as tutoring before and after school and during lunch. Other options include longer class periods, summer school, and other intervention strategies intended to accelerate underperforming students' learning. One proven intervention model that might already be in use in the district is a response to intervention system that quickly identifies the specific areas in which a student requires extra help. Providing interventions tailored to each student's needs must be an essential part of a district's implementation plan.

### **Plan long-range, articulated professional development**

District leadership, in collaboration with the stakeholder coalition, should begin planning professional development with a comprehensive review of the programs already in place and careful consideration of necessary changes to content and pedagogy.

Rethinking professional development begins with a concrete understanding of the available resources and the kind of professional development most likely to improve student performance.

District leaders should identify student learning priorities to target professional development that promotes the best practices to address student needs. The professional development plan must be systemic—both long-range and fully articulated across the entire staff and grade spans. Principals, charged with overseeing the implementation of the new standards at the school and classroom levels, will require professional development as well.

### **Foster communication across and within content areas**

The CCSS offer guidance on reading and writing beyond what occurs in an English class. The college and career readiness expectations in the CCSS reinforce the importance of reading and writing to building content knowledge in a range of disciplines and contexts. Since state standards in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects may not currently include literacy standards, explicit expectations related to content-area literacy will likely represent a significant change for teachers in these fields. Explicit strategies for building awareness of the CCSS and planning for their implementation will be needed.

For example, the following Reading Standards for Informational Text might just as easily be met in a social studies class as an English class:

- **Grade 7.** “Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).”
- **Grade 8.** “Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using

different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.”

- **Grade 9–10.** “Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.”

The Standards for Mathematical Practice provide another starting place for teachers in mathematics and other content areas to make connections. For example, the third Standard for Mathematical Practice, “construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others,” is a valuable proficiency for students across many subject areas. All students—not just mathematically proficient ones—should be expected to “understand and use stated assumptions, definitions, and previously established results in constructing arguments,” or “justify their conclusions, communicate them to others, and respond to the arguments of others.”

The English language arts CCSS have similar expectations that students be able to “write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence” and “write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.”

#### **Review current instructional materials**

District administrators can prepare for the identification of needed instructional materials by designating teams of teachers to examine CCSS-related resources as they emerge and make recommendations about which are best-suited for district students and teachers. Tools are available to assist districts in examining their instructional materials for alignment

to the CCSS and national groups will conduct alignment analyses of commonly used programs. The expectation is that every student will have equitable access to high-quality resources and similar opportunities for academic success as their schools and districts implement the CCSS. Districts should not rush to purchase new materials, but give thoughtful consideration to what will be needed to successfully implement the standards in their classrooms.

Statistics and data analysis play an important role in many subjects other than mathematics. Teachers of history, government, and the sciences rely on data to help interpret important elements. Collaboration with mathematics teachers will assist teachers of other subjects in identifying and reinforcing lessons from the mathematics classroom and demonstrate that the content is relevant in a variety of courses and the world of work.

During the initial transition phase it is important that districts stay apprised of the resources under development, for example the Open Educational Resources (OER). Many state education agencies now have offices devoted to identifying, reviewing, and sharing OERs and other digital resources. For more information about the OERs visit the OER Commons at <http://www.oercommons.org>.

#### **Create a transition plan for curricular content**

The new standards afford districts an opportunity to thoroughly examine what their teachers are teaching. Successful implementation requires schools to identify how the current curriculum is aligned to the new standards and where changes will be needed to address particular

standards. District administrators will want to engage teachers and others in identifying the possible shifts in grade-level complexity, depth, or particular topics. A new district curriculum framework or scope and sequence will likely be required. The implementation plan should address how the shifts in content will be determined and communicated.

The high school mathematics standards are not organized by course, but by conceptual categories. The instruction that addresses these standards is intended to be delivered over the course of three years in order to prepare students to be successful on the 11th grade assessment. Math classes must be designed to meet all of these standards within that time frame. District administrators will need to facilitate a process to determine the best course sequence that ensures all students have ample opportunity to meet all of the CCSS mathematics standards. Two model course pathways have been proposed: 1) a traditional Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II pathway; and 2) an integrated approach (one used by most other countries) of Mathematics I, II, and III. Both pathways address all of the standards, just in a different sequence. In addition to these two pathways, there are two model course pathways that are compacted for those students who want to take more advanced mathematics courses in high school. Descriptions of these model pathways can be found in Appendix A of the CCSS for Mathematics at [http://www.achieve.org/files/CCSSI\\_Mathematics%20Appendix%20A\\_101110.pdf](http://www.achieve.org/files/CCSSI_Mathematics%20Appendix%20A_101110.pdf).

#### **Conclusion**

The CCSS are intended to ensure that children across the country receive the best possible education, no matter where they live or what their background. These standards provide an accessible road map for schools, teachers, parents, and students, marked

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with clear and realistic goals. The implementation of the common standards and assessments represents a bold effort to set rigorous expectations for student learning that can guide educational improvement throughout each school and district across the nation. However, for the CCSS to work as intended, district administrators need to begin the transition now so that their schools are fully prepared to meet the challenge.

### Other resources in our Spotlight series

This edition of *Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards*, “What do district administrators need to know?” is the third in a series of briefs developed by Education Northwest to anticipate questions by various stakeholder groups directly affected by the adoption of the CCSS. Previous issues include “What do teachers need to know?” and “What do parents need to know?”—which is also available in Spanish. These resources, developed by the CCSS team at Education Northwest, offer stakeholders accurate and timely information to support efforts to adopt the standards. They can be found on our CCSS website, <http://educationnorthwest.org/common-core>, which focuses on what Northwest educators and policymakers need to know about CCSS developments in the region and across the nation.

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 or [Kit.Peixotto@educationnorthwest.org](mailto:Kit.Peixotto@educationnorthwest.org).

## What District Administrators Need To Do To Prepare for the CCSS

### Draft an implementation plan

- Which stakeholders should be recruited to serve on a team to develop the district’s implementation plan?
- What are the perceived challenges to effectively implementing the CCSS? What approaches are needed to effectively address these challenges in our district?
- What resources that others have developed can we use in our implementation efforts?

### Communicate how CCSS addresses equity

- What do the data indicate about student achievement for each student group in our district?
- What are the implications of these data for the implementation of the CCSS?

### Plan long-range, articulated professional development

- How will we determine the knowledge and skill needs of teachers?
- What does research say about effective professional development that impacts teacher practice and improves student learning?
- How will professional development be funded?

### Foster communication within and across content areas

- How can we facilitate and support collaboration among teachers that is focused on implementation of the standards?

### Review current instructional materials

- To what extent do existing instructional materials align with and address the standards?
- What changes can we make to better align our materials with the standards?

### Develop a transition plan and curriculum framework

- How can the curricular content developed by other organizations and districts inform the work of our district?
- How does our existing curricular content compare with other examples that “align with the standards”?