



ASCD®

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# Policy Points

## COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) outline what students should know and be able to do in reading and mathematics from kindergarten through 12th grade. The standards align with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully enter college or the workforce, are benchmarked to the standards of the world's top-performing countries, and mark the first time that states share a common set of expectations for the nation's students.

Forty-five states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core standards and are preparing to fully implement them—including administering tests based on them—in the 2014–15 school year. But rumors and myths about the CCSS have run rampant, causing confusion among educators, policymakers, and the public. This resource clarifies what the standards are and are not and tackles these myths head-on.

### COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

# Myths AND Facts

**MYTH:** The Common Core standards were developed by the federal government.

**FACT: States developed the standards.** The nation's governors and state education commissioners spearheaded Common Core development to provide clear and consistent understanding of the reading and math knowledge and skills that students need to be ready for lifelong learning and career success. Working through their representative organizations—the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)—state leaders collaborated with educators, subject matter experts, and researchers to write and review the standards. The federal government was not involved with the standards' development.

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**MYTH:** The federal government required states to adopt the standards.

**FACT: State Common Core adoption is voluntary.** Four states (Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia) have chosen not to adopt the standards in either subject, and Minnesota has adopted the English language arts standards but not the math standards. However, the federal government's Race to the Top grant competition incentivized states to adopt college and career readiness standards, such as the CCSS, by providing state applicants with additional points for doing so. Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education required states to adopt college- and career-ready standards in order to receive waivers from No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. To receive a waiver, states needed to adopt either the Common Core standards or another set of reading and math college- and career- ready standards approved by its network of higher education institutions.

**MYTH:** The Common Core standards include all core academic subjects.

**FACT: The Common Core includes only mathematics and English language arts standards.** The standards do, however, connect with student learning in other subjects by emphasizing literacy, academic vocabulary, problem solving, and mathematical reasoning across the curriculum, including in history and science. Separate efforts to create model standards for science, social studies, and the arts are under way, but these efforts are not part of the CCSS. States have complete control over which standards to adopt. They may adopt the CCSS without adopting standards in other subjects and vice versa. Additionally, states may choose to adopt only the reading or only the math portion of the Common Core standards.

**MYTH:** The Common Core standards will fully prepare students for college and their careers.

**FACT: Students need more than reading and math proficiency to be fully ready for college and their careers.** To be sure, the CCSS—which are often described as college- and career-readiness standards—are an important first step in delineating the reading and math knowledge and skills that students will need to succeed after high school graduation. But to attain

postsecondary success, students must have access to a comprehensive education that also includes instruction in the arts, civics and government, economics, foreign languages, geography, health education, history, physical education, and science.

Furthermore, a whole child approach to education is essential to realizing the promise of the standards. Only when students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged will they be able to meet our highest expectations and realize their fullest potential. Similarly, effective professional development that helps educators integrate the standards into the classroom and translate the standards into instructional strategies that meet their students' unique needs is crucial to the new standards' success.

**MYTH:** The Common Core standards are a national curriculum that dictates what and how every educator must teach.

**FACT: The standards are not a curriculum.** Standards are targets for what students should know and be able to do. Curricula are the instructional plans and strategies that educators use to help their students reach those expectations. The CCSS are a set of shared goals for the knowledge and skills students should possess in English language arts and mathematics to be proficient in those subjects. As such, districts and schools should use the standards as a basis for developing their own curricula by designing course content, choosing appropriate instructional strategies, developing learning activities, continuously gauging student understanding, and adjusting instruction accordingly.

**MYTH:** The CCSS will usurp local control of schools.

**FACT: School boards remain responsible for setting their own visions and executing their own approaches for helping students reach the standards.** In addition, districts and schools will continue to choose their own textbooks and instructional materials, provide teachers with tailored professional development, and design supports and interventions to help students reach proficiency. Moreover, states adopting the Common Core standards had the option to add up to an additional 15 percent of locally developed standards.

School districts have always had to abide by state-approved education standards, of which the CCSS is one example. At the same time, districts had the flexibility and responsibility to implement the state-approved standards in a manner that reflected their local contexts and students' needs. The same holds true with the Common Core standards. As has always been the case, educators and local communities will continue to make decisions about what happens in their districts, schools, and classrooms.

**MYTH: Student test scores will plummet on the new Common Core assessments compared with scores on current state assessments.**

**FACT: The Common Core assessments that are under development are new tests based on new standards, which means that they will set a brand-new benchmark for student performance.** As such, it is simply not valid to compare scores on the new tests with scores on previous state assessments.

To measure student understanding of the Common Core standards, the majority of states are participating in one of the two assessment consortia that are developing tests aligned with the standards: The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced). In addition to setting those new performance benchmarks, the consortia's assessment systems differ markedly from current state assessments in delivery, complexity, and timing. Both consortia's assessments are computer-based and will feature more varied and sophisticated questions—including performance-based items—that are designed to evaluate students' problem-solving and critical-thinking skills. In addition, both consortia are offering optional interim assessments intended to help educators adjust and differentiate their instruction throughout the year.

**MYTH: The Common Core assessments are not more expensive than current state assessments.**

**FACT: It depends on the state in question and what expenses are rolled into the assessment costs.** PARCC estimates that its summative assessments will cost \$29.50 per student. The consortium reports that about half of the PARCC states currently spend more on

their summative tests, while the remaining states spend less. Meanwhile, Smarter Balanced estimates that its summative assessments will cost \$22.50 per student, which it says is less than what two-thirds of its member states currently pay for their assessments.

Although the consortia tests may be less expensive than what the majority of states are currently paying for their assessments, these cost estimates do not encompass all of the additional expenses associated with implementing the new assessments. Most states will need to upgrade classroom technology and improve their technological infrastructure and capacity to administer the computer-based tests. For example, districts and schools need to be sure they have ample network bandwidth and enough computers that meet the minimum operating system requirements to support large groups of students participating in testing simultaneously. PARCC plans to offer a paper-and-pencil version of its test during the first year of implementation for schools that don't make these technological investments right away, but the paper tests have an additional cost of \$3.00 to \$4.00 per student. In addition, both PARCC and Smarter Balanced are developing optional formative assessments, which will cost states extra, to measure student understanding and performance throughout the year.

**MYTH: States, districts, and schools are spending excessive resources on Common Core implementation.**

**FACT: Although transitioning to the new standards will initially cost states additional money, the collaborative nature of the Common Core provides states with the opportunity to share resources, assessments, and educator professional development, resulting in economies of scale never before possible.**

It's also important to note that the costs associated with CCSS implementation—updating instructional materials, providing professional development for educators, and improving assessments—are ongoing investments for states, districts, and schools and would be requisite expenses for any new standards a state chooses to adopt. A report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute affirms that if states' current expenditures in those three areas are taken into consideration, the initial cost of transitioning to the new standards "does not have to be

wildly expensive—and could also support changes that have a permanent and positive impact on the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning.” By its estimates, the initial, one-time expenses of transitioning to the Common Core standards would cost, for example, New York State an additional \$71 million (or \$26.00 per student) and Iowa \$16 million (or \$33.00 per student) if the states opt for a balanced implementation approach that seeks to reduce costs in some areas while investing in more effective strategies in others.

**MYTH:** Implementing the new standards involves analyzing and reporting information about individual students and puts students’ privacy at risk.

**FACT:** Common Core participation does not require student-level data sharing, analysis, or reporting.

Each state decides how to assess its students on the standards and how to use the results of those assessments. PARCC and Smarter Balanced will collect basic demographic data on students so that states have information on subgroup performance for accountability purposes, but they will not report assessment or demographic information at the individual student level. States will make their own decisions about whether to further analyze or share the assessment data as a way to inform, improve, and personalize instruction.

## ASCD RESOURCES *for the* COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- **The EduCore digital tool** provides educators with free, evidence-based resources, strategies, formative assessment lessons, and videos to help with the transition to the Common Core State Standards. <http://educore.ascd.org>
- **ASCD’s Common Core web** page includes background information about the initiative and links to CCSS videos, webinars, professional development, and more. [www.ascd.org/commoncore](http://www.ascd.org/commoncore)
- **Core Connection:** ASCD’s free e-newsletter, sent every two weeks, features the latest Common Core news and resources, from updates about PARCC and Smarter Balanced to information on states’ implementation progress. [www.ascd.org/coreconnection](http://www.ascd.org/coreconnection)
- **ASCD EDge®:** ASCD’s professional networking community for educators includes two CCSS-focused groups—ASCD’s Common Core Standards and Common Core in the Classroom—that allow educators to network and share resources about the standards. <http://ascdedge.ascd.org>

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