**Frequently Asked Questions About the Common Core State Standards**

**What are academic standards?**

Academic standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning in each grade level.

Although the standards provide objectives for students and teachers, decisions about classroom instruction are generally made at the local level by teachers, administrators and school boards.

**What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics. A total of 45 states have voluntarily adopted the standards, which are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared for college courses or to enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and mathematics in school.

**Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?**

High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that are aligned with expectations in college and the job market. The standards 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 United States and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to each state, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies, including:

* the development of textbooks, digital media and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
* the development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually that will replace existing state testing systems; and
* changes needed to help support educators and schools align lessons to the new standards.

**Are the standards internationally benchmarked?**

Yes. International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards.

**What grade levels are included in the Common Core State Standards?**

The English language arts and math standards are for grades K-12. Research from the early childhood and higher education communities also informed the development of the standards.

**What do the Common Core State Standards mean for students?**

The standards provide clarity and consistency about what is expected of student learning across the state and country. This initiative helps provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of where they live. The Common Core State Standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students, but they will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction and teacher preparation.

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

The standards include information on application of the standards for these groups of students. They also give states the opportunity to share experiences and best practices, which can lead to an improved ability to serve young people with disabilities and English language learners.

**How do the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?**

The standards impact teachers by:

* providing goals and benchmarks to ensure students are achieving certain skills and knowledge by the end of each year;
* helping colleges and professional-development programs better prepare teachers;
* providing the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of new assessments;
* guiding educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subjects and the skills they need to apply their knowledge.

**What guidance do the Common Core State Standards provide to teachers?**

The standards establish what students are expected to understand and be able to do by the end of each school year. However, they do not dictate how educators should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

**Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?**

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.

**How were the Common Core State Standards developed?**

The development of the standards was a voluntary, state-led effort coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices with contributions from stakeholders from nearly every state in the country. In the fall of 2009, governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, including California, two territories and the District of Columbia committed to developing a set of standards that would help prepare students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in education and careers after high school. The feedback and the review process was integral to the shaping of these new standards and included educators from kindergarten through grade twelve, postsecondary faculty, curriculum and assessment experts, researchers, national organizations, and community groups. .

**By what criteria were the standards developed?**

The standards made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence, including:

* scholarly research;
* surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs;
* assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance;
* comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations;
* National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing for English language arts; and
* Findings from Trends in International Mathematics and Science (TIMSS) and other studies.

In particular, the following criteria guided the development of the standards:

* alignment with expectations for college and career success;
* clarity;
* consistency across all states;
* inclusion of content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills;
* improvement upon current state standards and standards of top-performing nations; and
* reality-based expectations.

**Who led the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input during the development of the standards.

**Who was involved in the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. Each state independently made the decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards. Local teachers, principals and superintendents lead the implementation.

**What was California's adoption process?**

In January 2010, Senate Bill X5 1 established the Academic Content Standards Commission (ACSC) to develop academic content standards for ELA and mathematics. The ACSC was composed of members appointed by the governor and the legislature, the majority of whom were current public school elementary or secondary classroom teachers. The ACSC was authorized to make recommendations to the California State Board of Education (SBE) to approve or disapprove the CCSS and to supplement those standards with up to 15 percent additional standards. The ACSC met four times in 2010, and provided its recommendations to the SBE on July 15, 2010. The SBE voted unanimously to adopt the recommendations of the ACSC on August 2, 2010.

**Does the federal government play a role in standards implementation?**

The federal government had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards and will not have a role in their implementation. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind. Adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory.

**Why are the Common Core State Standards for just English language arts and math?**

English language arts and math were the subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they are areas upon which students build skill sets which are used in other subjects. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes.

**Are there plans to develop common standards in other areas in the future?**

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are not leading the development of standards in other academic content areas. Below is information on efforts of other organizations to develop standards in other academic subjects.

* Science: In a process managed by Achieve, with the help of the National Research Council, the National Science Teachers Association, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, states are developing the Next Generation Science Standards. More information about this effort can be found [here](http://www.nextgenscience.org/).
* World Languages: The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages published an alignment of the National Standards for Learning Languages with the ELA Common Core State Standards. More information about this effort can be found [here](http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Aligning_CCSS_Language_Standards_v6.pdf).
* Arts: The National Coalition for Core Arts Standards is leading the revision of the National Standards for Arts Education. More information about this effort can be found [here](http://www.arteducators.org/news/national-coalition-for-core-arts-standards-nccas).

**Will there be new Common Core-aligned assessments?**

Yes. California is participating in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) with a number of other states to prepare a common set of assessments based on the standards. The SBAC is developing new assessments that will be fully implemented in California in the spring of 2015. There was pilot testing in 2012–13 and field testing in 2013–14.

**Will the new tests include any standards unique to California?**

In introducing the CCSS, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers advised that states could adopt up to an additional 15 percent while remaining true to the CCSS; California exercised this option. In addition to adopting the CCSS, the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a number of additional standards the SBE recognized as being important for maintaining the rigor of the 1997 standards. The SBAC assessments will not include these California additions as they will be based solely on the standards shared by all adopting states.