Common Core State Standards—General Brief

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish consistent and clear education standards for English-language arts and mathematics so students will be prepared for success in today's world.

- Standards are simply the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and in their careers.
- Because the best understanding of education comes from the ground up, the Standards are being developed by the states— not the federal government — and they incorporate the best and highest of the current state standards.
- These standards, which will be voluntarily adopted by states, will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

These clear, consistent standards will prepare young people for success in college and work, establishing what students need to learn, while allowing schools and teachers to decide how best to help students.

- The Standards will provide students, teachers, and parents with a shared understanding of what students are expected to learn.
- With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together for shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.
- When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today’s jobs, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

The Common Core State Standards will help prepare all students for success in college and work, regardless of where they live.

- Consistent standards will provide appropriate learning goals for all students, and they will be relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills our young people need for success in both college and work.
- Informed by content experts, teachers, researchers and others, the process used to write the standards was designed to ensure that the standards were informed by:
  - the best state standards;
  - the experience of teachers, content experts, states and leading thinkers; and
  - feedback from the general public.

For more information, contact the Hunt Institute at (919) 425-4183 or info@hunt-institute.org.

Working at the intersection of policy and politics
Common Core State Standards—Key Points

- Standards are simply the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and at work.

- The *Common Core State Standards Initiative* is a state-led effort to establish consistent and clear education standards for English-language arts and mathematics so students will be prepared for success in today’s world.

- These clear, consistent standards will establish what students need to learn, while allowing schools and teachers to decide how best to help students. They are relevant to the real world and will help prepare all students for success in college and work, regardless of where they live.

- With students, parents, teachers, and principals working together for shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.

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Working at the intersection of policy and politics
Common Core State Standards—Content-Specific Analysis

- Standards are the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and at work. Today, we have different academic standards in every state, and too many states have standards that are not at a level that would prepare student for college or careers.

- College and career readiness means the ability to enter into a postsecondary school without remediation or the ability to enter a job that would provide a livable wage as defined by the Department of Labor.

- The Common Core State Standards are designed to provide consistent learning goals for all students, regardless of where they live, and allow parents and teachers to more effectively help all students achieve at those goals.

- The Standards drafting process relied on standards experts from across the country. In addition, many state experts participated in review and comment periods to create the most thoughtful and transparent process. This was only made possible by many states working together.

- The goal from the outset was to apply the most advanced, current thinking on how to prepare young people for success in college and in their careers to move even the best state standards to the next level. So while they certainly were informed by the best standards in the country, these common core standards reflect evidence and expertise.

- Unfortunately, young people – even in high-performing states – are graduating and passing all the required tests, and still require remediation in their postsecondary work, which is why the common core standards are anchored in preparing young people for college and career success.

- For example, most of today's high school students master narrative writing, which includes expressing opinions, beliefs, and personal experiences. That’s a form of writing rarely required in the workplace or at college.

- Because of the type of writing needed in the workplace and college, the English-language arts Standards put a greater emphasis on writing arguments. And because college and career readiness overwhelming focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are reading, writing, and researching in history and science, in addition to literature.

- Also, evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The common core standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

- In math, the teaching practices of high-performing countries and the National Research Council’s Early Math Panel report indicate that it is important to focus on arithmetic in early grades – in part, because it takes time to master it.
The Common Core State Standards for math require a level of mastery in mathematics unlike any current system of standards. For example, nine laws of arithmetic underlie algebra – no current set of standards even shows what they are, but the Standards make them the building blocks, building the foundation that students will need to successfully master algebra.

In addition, the Standards commit to teaching mathematics in a real world context – a way that you might apply the approach/reasoning to problems that aren’t presented as math problems.

The high school Standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

The Common Core State Standards also address a problem identified by the National Mathematics Panel and international benchmarking studies: Today’s math textbooks are overloaded, fragmented, sometimes incoherent, and lacking in presentation of concepts.

In the common core standards, the mathematical progressions are careful and coherent, which will make it easier to develop better textbooks. Textbooks in high-performing Singapore are not only more focused than U.S. textbooks, they also present the concepts that underlie the skills.

The best understanding of what works in education comes from the ground up. That’s why the Standards are being developed by the states – not the federal government –and they will incorporate the best and highest of the current state standards.

And the best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That’s why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the Standards.

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On March 10, 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices released a draft of the English Language Arts and Mathematics K-12 Common Core State Standards. Education standards – the outline of the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and in their careers – are an important, yet often mystifying, component of our systems of education across the country.

The following document attempts to shed light on the recently released draft and provide: an overview of the evidence base from which they were drawn, key areas of focus, and an outline of the supports built into the standards to enrich teacher understanding.

Overview
The draft ELA Common Core State Standards advance the best elements of standards-related work to date. The Standards articulate a clear progression of learning from kindergarten to 12th grade. The standards illustrate a vision for student literacy – across subject areas – that applies to reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This breakthrough resource is designed to help teachers better understand how instructional efforts at each grade level contribute to college readiness.

Evidence Base
The Standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations. The Standards also build on the firm foundation of the NAEP frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

Responding to the Evidence Base
- **Clear focus on college and career readiness.** A particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that its mastery was essential for students to be college and career ready in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society. As new and better evidence emerges, the Standards will be revised accordingly. By focusing on the most essential elements of college and career success, teachers and students gain time to practice and achieve excellent performance.

- **Greater focus on text complexity.** There is clear evidence that the texts students are reading today are not of sufficient complexity and rigor to prepare them for the reading demands of college and careers. The Standards devote as much attention to the complexity of what students are reading as to how students read. As students advance through the grades, they must both develop their comprehension skills and apply them to increasingly complex texts.

- **Shared responsibility for students’ literacy development.** Most college and career reading consists of sophisticated informational text in a variety of content areas. The Standards include a
significant focus on informational text in grades 6-12, and a special section designed for history/social studies and science teachers to supplement the content standards in their respective disciplines. This focus is in addition to, not in place of, literary texts.

- **A focus on writing to argue or explain in the later grades.** The Standards include student capacity in three areas of writing: argument, information/explanation, and narrative. As students progress toward grades 9-12, the emphasis on writing shifts to focus overwhelmingly on writing to argue, inform, and explain. This emphasis is in accordance with NAEP’s shifting emphasis.

- **Research and media skills integrated into the Standards as a whole.** In college and the workforce, students will need to research information and must consume and produce media. As media is embedded into every element of today’s curriculum, it is also embedded throughout the Standards rather than treated as a separate section.

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

**Support for Teacher Understanding and Innovation**

The Standards use individual grade levels in grades K-8, then two-year grade bands in grades 9-12 (9-10 and 11-12) to allow schools, districts, and states greater flexibility in high school course design.

The Standards are designed to show teachers how each element connects with the grades preceding and following, and ultimately the connection to college and career readiness.

The Standards include three appendices to help educators and others better understand the content and use the resource for classroom instruction. The appendices provide: extensive information on the research supporting key elements of the Standards, examples of texts to illustrate appropriate range of reading for various grade levels, and annotated writing samples to demonstrate adequate performance at various grades levels.

**About the Common Core State Standards**

The Standards, the development of which was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA), build on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards, including their work on the American Diploma Project with Achieve. The Standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, and educators from kindergarten through college.

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On March 10, 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices released a draft of the English Language Arts and Mathematics K-12 Common Core State Standards. Education standards – the outline of the skills and knowledge young people need to be successful in college and in their careers – are an important, yet often mystifying, component of our systems of education across the country.

The following document attempts to shed light on the recently released draft and provide: an overview of the evidence base from which they were drawn, key areas of focus, and an outline of the supports built into the standards to enrich teacher understanding.

**Overview**

The draft *Common Core State Standards in Mathematics* is a breakthrough in focus and coherence. The *Standards* articulate a progression of learning that deepens a student’s ability to understand and use mathematics. The draft concentrates on core conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades, thus enabling teachers to take the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well – and to give students the opportunity to really master them.

**Evidence Base**

The *Standards* have 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; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations. Notable in the research base are conclusions from TIMSS and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement. To deliver on the promise of common standards, the *Standards* must address the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

**Responding to the Evidence Base**

- **Focus as seen in high performing countries.** In current practice, many teachers must rush though material in an effort to cover a broad swath of topics. As a result, students learn enough to get by on the next test but do not engage in deep learning. Teachers must then spend significant time reviewing concepts again the following year. The *Standards* focus on critical elements for future learning and application, giving students more time to develop the procedural fluency and conceptual understanding that are needed to truly master mathematical concepts.

- **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 math concepts and procedures. The *Standards* devote attention to these building blocks, thus aligning with practices of high performing countries and the recommendations of our own National Research Council’s Early Math Panel report. For example, kindergarten is focused on the *number core*: learning how numbers correspond to quantities, and learning how to put numbers together and take them apart (the beginnings of addition and subtraction).


- **Preparation for algebra in grade 8.** The Standards for middle school are robust and provide a coherent and rich preparation for high school mathematics. Students who have mastered the content and skills through the 7th grade will be well-prepared for algebra in grade 8.

- **Application to the real world.** The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The Standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

- **Emphasis on mathematical modeling.** The Standards require middle school and high school students to use mathematics and statistics to analyze empirical situations, understand them better, and improve decisions. As students choose and use appropriate strategies, they develop a better sense of quantities and their relationships in physical, economic, public policy, social, and everyday situations. Students are encouraged to use technology in developing mathematical models, allowing them to vary assumptions, explore consequences, and compare predictions with data.

### Support for Teacher Understanding and Innovation

The K-5 standards provide detailed guidance to teachers on how to navigate their way through knotty topics such as fractions, negative numbers, and geometry, and do so by maintaining a continuous progression from grade to grade. Today’s best state standards as well as international models, education research, and the insights of professional mathematicians informed these grade-by-grade progressions.

By drawing on the best lessons from high performing countries, the standards provide the foundation for redesigning and focusing the math curriculum – and moving sharply away from the "mile wide and an inch deep" curricula currently in place throughout the U.S.

The Standards ensure that students spend sufficient time mastering the building blocks of mathematical thinking in K-5, allowing middle school and high school teachers to engage students in hands-on learning and real world application in geometry, algebra and probability and statistics.

In response to requests from states, an extensive appendix has been developed to demonstrate options for crafting high school courses from the Standards. The information in the appendix is meant to generate discussion among those who review the Standards.

### About the Common Core State Standards

The Standards, the development of which was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), build on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards, including their work on the American Diploma Project with Achieve. The Standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, and educators from kindergarten through college.

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Myths v. Facts About the Common Core Standards

**Myths About Content and Quality: General**

**Myth:** Adopting common standards will bring all states’ standards down to the lowest common denominator, which means states with high standards will be taking a step backwards if they adopt the Standards.

**Fact:** The Standards are designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college and their careers. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The Standards were informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. We need college and career ready standards because even in high-performing states – students are graduating and passing all the required tests and still require remediation in their postsecondary work.

**Myth:** The Standards are not internationally benchmarked.

**Fact:** International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career ready standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data consulted in the benchmarking process is included in this appendix. More evidence from international sources will be presented together with the final draft.

**Myth:** The Standards only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge.

**Fact:** The Standards recognize that both content and skills are important.

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

In Mathematics, the Standards 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 math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The Standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.
Myths About Content and Quality: English-language arts

**Myth:** The Standards suggest teaching “Grapes of Wrath” to second graders.

**Fact:** The ELA Standards suggest “Grapes of Wrath” as a text that would be appropriate for 9th or 10th grade readers. Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The Common Core State Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

**Myth:** The Standards are just vague descriptions of skills; they don’t include a reading list or any other similar reference to content.

**Fact:** The Standards do include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the Standards. The exemplars of high quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been very well received. This provides teachers with the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use – while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

**Myth:** English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.

**Fact:** With the Common Core ELA Standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelming focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

**Myth:** The Standards don’t have enough emphasis on fiction/literature

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

Myths About Content and Quality: Math

**Myth:** The Standards do not prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the 8th grade, as many states’ current standards do.

**Fact:** The Standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th grade, by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in 8th grade. At the same time, grade 8 standards are also included; these include rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively into a full Algebra 1 course.
Myth: Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.

Fact: The mathematical progressions presented in the common core are coherent and based on evidence.

Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that today, different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

**Myths About Process**

**Myth:** No teachers were involved in writing the Standards.

**Fact:** The common core state standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together. For more information, please visit: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

**Myth:** The Standards are not research or evidence based.

**Fact:** The Standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In English language arts, the Standards build on the firm foundation of the NAEP frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In Mathematics, the Standards draw on conclusions from TIMSS and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

**Myths About Implementation**

**Myth:** The Standards tell teachers what to teach.

**Fact:** The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That’s why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.
**Myth:** The *Standards* will be implemented through NCLB – signifying the federal government will be leading them.

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of the *Standards* is in no way mandatory. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the Recovery Act or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint were released because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government.

**Myth:** These *Standards* amount to a national curriculum for our schools.

**Fact:** The *Standards* are not a curriculum. They are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide *how* the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.