



# Common Core State Standards Initiative: Most Common Parent Questions



## What are educational standards and why do we need them?

Kansas has had educational standards for many years. The standards provide clear goals for student learning in different subject areas and help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, whether they plan to go on to postsecondary education or enter the workforce. Common standards, which are shared among many states, will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. In addition, common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students.

## Do standards tell teachers how to teach our kids?

Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have so that they can build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms. Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success. Standards are a first step – a key building block – in providing our young people with a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college and work. Of course, standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

## How are educational standards typically determined?

Prior to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, each state had its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, expectations for student learning varied widely from state to state.

## What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish a shared set of clear educational standards for English language arts and mathematics that states can voluntarily adopt. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace. The Kansas State Board of Education adopted the Common Core Standards in English language arts and mathematics in October 2010.

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

This initiative is important because it helps ensure all children across the country are given the tools they need to succeed. High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that everyone can work toward together. This will ensure that we maintain America's competitive edge, so that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here at home, but with students from around the world.

These standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.

## Who led the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

Parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders, through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) led the effort to develop a common core of state standards. In addition, CCSSO and the NGA Center provided public comment periods for everyone to submit feedback on the draft standards documents. Those comments were incorporated into the final standards.



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## How did Kansas adopt the common core state standards?

A representative sample of educators, in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics, from across the state came together to review and provide feedback to the development of the national common core standards. As drafts were received, it was clear that what Kansas teachers believed was important for students to know and be able to do to succeed was being included in the Common Core State Standards. In October 2010, the Kansas State Board of Education adopted the standards.

Across the country, the process of state standards adoption depends on the laws of each state. So while some will adopt through their state boards of education like Kansas, others are adopting them through their state legislatures.

## Will the common core state standards keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?

No. The Common Core State Standards 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. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

## Does having common standards lead to dumbing down the standards across the board?

No. The Common Core State 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. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom. 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.

## Will more standards mean more tests?

No. For states that choose to adopt these common standards, having one set of standards will make it easier for states to pool information and resources to develop a shared set of high-quality tests to better evaluate student progress. The goal is not to have more tests, but to have smarter and better tests that help students, parents, and teachers.

## What criteria were used to develop the standards?

The standards were developed using the following criteria:

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success
- Clear, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn
- Consistent across all states, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live
- Include both content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations
- Realistic, for effective use in the classroom
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society
- Evidence and research-based criteria have been set by states, through their national organizations CCSSO and the NGA Center.



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### **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 have also informed the development of the standards.

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

Common standards will provide a greater opportunity for within- and across-state sharing experiences and best practices that can lead to an improved ability to best serve young people with disabilities and English language learners. Additionally, the K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English language learners and students with disabilities.

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

English-language arts and math were the first subjects chosen for the common core state standards because these two subjects are skills upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes.

### **What will these common core state standards mean for my student?**

The standards will provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country. Until now, every state has had its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students at the same grade level in different states have been expected to achieve at different levels. This initiative will allow states to share information effectively and help provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of where they live. Common standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students. Rather, they will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning. In a global economy, students must be prepared to compete with not only their American peers in the next state, but with students from around the world. These standards will help prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and careers.