

# Common Core State Standards

## Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are the Common Core State Standards?

A: The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of shared K-12 learning expectations for students in English language arts and mathematics. The standards are the result of a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The CCSS for grades K-12 were developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including content experts, state education leaders, teachers, school administrators, and parents. The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in K-12 mathematics and English language arts. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. The CCSS supports the college and career ready expectations.

Q: Why does Arkansas need common educational standards?

A: Today, each state has its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn can vary widely from state to state. We know that our graduates will compete for jobs with students from other states and countries with more rigorous standards. Common standards help ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to serve the needs of students.

Q: Will the Common Core State Standards prevent local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?

A: 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 develop 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. Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers understand the knowledge and skills their students should have so that teachers can build the best lessons for their classrooms.

Q: Will the new Common Core State Standards completely replace Arkansas's existing academic standards for mathematics and English language arts?

A: Yes. However, many of Arkansas's current academic content standards and student learning expectations align to the CCSS, although the CCSS may introduce

some content at different grade levels and the breadth and depth of topic complexities may be greater.

Q: The Common Core State Standards are more rigorous than existing state standards. Will we see a drop in test scores due to the more rigorous standards?

A: Parents, students, and teachers should understand that lower scores will not mean students know less than they did the year before. The new standards require a higher level of mastery of information and concepts and this higher bar may impact student scores, at least initially. This often occurs when major systemic change happens. There is a dip in scores for a short period of time until schools are able to incorporate all the changes that are a part of the CCSS. As the new requirements are established, our scores will rise.

Q: What is the ADE doing to help schools transition to the Common Core State Standards?

A: Moving to Common Core in two content areas and replacing the statewide assessment in these subjects represents a major change for Arkansas. A state implementation team led by the ADE and comprised of educators, administrators, and education stakeholders is working to develop a comprehensive implementation plan, which includes a timeline and identified resources.

The Department has completed a crosswalk table that compares the Common Core State Standards to the Arkansas learning standards. This document illustrates which standards have moved to different grade levels and includes comments that will assist teachers as they begin reviewing the new Common Core. The crosswalk has been sent to each school district and education cooperative and is also available on the ADE website. Professional development opportunities will begin during the spring semester and will help guide the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. In addition to state designed professional development resources, the ADE will leverage national collaborative efforts that are currently underway to provide K-12 educators a variety of tools and resources, including a shared content framework.

Q: Will States receive financial help to implement the Common Core State Standards?

A: Due to the commonality of the CCSS, resources designed to support the standards have the potential to be shared readily with states. A **Joint Task Force on the Mathematics**, which includes the four major mathematics education organizations in the country, has united to help support mathematics educators in the implementation of the new CCSS. A primary goal of this group is to create a CCSS implementation website that includes a variety of tools and resources for K-12 teachers. A **Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project** funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has designed English language arts curriculum maps for use by school districts.

It is anticipated that, in the future, textbooks and curriculum resources could be available through open source environments for use by all participating states.

The benefits of adopting the Common Core State Standards far outweigh the short-term costs districts will require in the transition. The 25 states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) plan to develop content frameworks, units of study, and performance tasks aligned to the CCSS, and additional resources. These will be available for all of our school districts to use. The economies of scale that the Common Core will bring to Arkansas will allow our state to spend more of its K-12 budget on other vital efforts to support teaching and learning in the classroom.

Q: When will students begin to see these changes in the classroom?

A: Students will begin seeing Common Core content next school year (2011-12) in grades K-2. Districts will first need to work with teachers to "unpack" the standards to understand the knowledge and skills contained within each learning expectation. Teachers at each grade level will need to determine what new content they are responsible for teaching and the changes in the depth and breadth of the learning expectations related to the content as well as what content will no longer be taught in their grade level.

Q: The Common Core State Standards will require a common assessment. When will that take effect?

A: It is expected that states adopting the Common Core State Standards will also implement a student assessment system aligned with the CCSS beginning in the 2014-15 school year. Along with 25 other states, Arkansas is a member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) which has formed to create an historic assessment system to provide more services and supports to students and teachers than are currently available. The common assessment is a natural continuation of the work already underway in Arkansas and builds on our current assessment system. By partnering with other states, we will be able to leverage resources, share expertise, and produce a system that will meet the needs and expectations of Arkansas students and teachers

Until a common assessment is designed, piloted, and implemented, the ADE will continue using the Benchmark and End of Course exams to assess students in mathematics, English language arts, and science.

For more information about the Common Core, go to:

[http://arkansased.org/educators/curriculum/common\\_core.html](http://arkansased.org/educators/curriculum/common_core.html)