

**common**

**CORE**

COLLEGE- AND  
CAREER-READY  
STANDARDS



The Institute for a Competitive Workforce (ICW) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. ICW promotes the rigorous educational standards and effective job training systems needed to preserve the strength of America's greatest economic resource, its workforce.



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STANDARDS



## More Students Prepared for College and Career Through Common Core State Standards

To ensure all students are prepared for success after graduation and to significantly improve American competitiveness, governors from both political parties, chief state school officials, and community leaders from 48 states met and worked with top education experts and academics to produce the Common Core State Standards, taking into account more than 10,000 pieces of feedback from individuals, teachers, and organizations. **Common Core State Standards are, quite simply, a prioritized, clearly stated list of skills a student must master in each grade level in order to be on track to succeed in college-level work.** These standards are internationally benchmarked and, for the first time in generations, raise the bar for American students to the level of their international peers. By supporting higher standards aligned to career and college expectations, business leaders are putting students' full potential first. Adoption of the Common Core State Standards, which business leaders see as common sense, is one of the most successful education reforms for higher standards of the past decade. Change within public institutions is always difficult, and the execution of the new standards with fidelity and speed will need the support of business and community leaders, legislators, educators, and parents.

Our education system is falling behind by many measures. American students rank 21st in science and 26th in math, beaten out by students in countries like China, Poland, and Canada.<sup>1</sup> And for 40 years, eighth grade reading scores have improved only negligibly. The consequences of trailing competing nations are already resonating in the marketplace and in households. Young Americans ages 25 through 34 rank 12th in college attainment.<sup>2</sup> And while young adults around the world are quickly surpassing their parents' education, America's young people as a whole have merely matched the attainment levels of the previous generation by their mid-thirties.<sup>3</sup> U.S. employers are taking notice. They have seen a growing gap between the skills they need and the skills recent high school and college graduates have developed. Data support their claims: last year, three out of every four graduating high school students weren't adequately prepared for college.<sup>4</sup> The number of undergraduates placed in remediation is

shocking: half of all undergraduates and 70% of community college students take at least one remedial course.<sup>5</sup> Of the community college students who enroll in remediation, only a quarter will graduate within eight years, often because they never advance to credit-bearing prerequisite courses.<sup>6</sup>

Even as we have enrolled millions of new students in postsecondary education, the percentage of young adults receiving a college credential has remained relatively flat.<sup>7</sup> To ensure our future competitiveness, it is vital that communities act to guarantee that all children receive a rigorous, relevant, and quality education that adequately prepares them for future success.

In the past, most state educational standards did not portray an honest picture of students' preparedness for college and careers. Standards were a mile wide and an inch deep, with teachers left to determine what should be prioritized. A high school diploma has been an empty promise for success as far too many students received good grades and were told they were on track, only to fail in college-level work. Students need to be placed on a solid path to succeed in college or careers, not just told that they're headed in the right direction.

The Fordham Institute determined that the new standards were clearly better than the existing standards in 37 states for English and 39 states for math.<sup>8</sup> Every mathematics society president endorsed Common Core, calling it an "auspicious advance in mathematics education."<sup>9</sup> By elevating the ground floor across every participating state, Common Core provides clear and consistent guidelines of what students should know and be able to do at each grade level, eliminating uneven expectations for students. The math and literacy skills a fourth-grader is expected to master should be the same if they live in Boise or Baltimore. These new standards will give parents a clearer understanding of what their children are expected to learn and will help them guide their children's education. Teachers have been overwhelmingly supportive of Common Core with more than 75% believing Common Core will have a positive effect on students' ability to think critically and use reasoning skills.<sup>10</sup>

Just like a business plan, Common Core provides states with a road map to reach the next level of student learning. By adopting standards with clearer, more detailed expectations of proficiency, Common Core

significantly reduces room for interpretation regarding what students should be able to master by each grade. Now, states are piloting new assessments to show whether student learning meets these more rigorous standards. New assessments will enable teachers and state and district administrators to identify shortcomings to improve student performance and examine what works.

## What Are the Standards?

The English language arts/literacy standards challenge students to read like a detective and write like an investigative reporter across academic disciplines. Not only do the standards ask students to focus on reading, writing, and speaking using evidence from text, they require regular practice with complex text and academic language. This includes a greater emphasis on building knowledge and communication skills through a focus on nonfiction works, similar to those they will need to read and understand in the workplace one day. Raising the bar for reading and writing skills across subjects such as history and science better prepares students for future work or study after high school.

## Clearer Goals for the Classroom

### Comparisons Between Former Florida Standards and Common Core

#### Seventh Grade Reading Standard

*Former Standard:* Use a variety of strategies to comprehend grade-level text.

*Common Core:* Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

#### High School Math Standard

*Former Standard:* Determine probabilities of independent events. Understand and use the concept of conditional probability.

*Common Core:* Recognize and explain the concepts of conditional probability and independence in everyday language and everyday situations. For example, compare the chance of having lung cancer if you are a smoker with the chance of being a smoker if you have lung cancer.

*Source:* "Comparing Florida's Standards: What Makes the Common Core State Standards Better for Florida's Students," *Florida Department of Education*, 2013.

The math standards focus on making math make sense. The study of mathematics is not about memorizing a disconnected list of tricks. Students must develop reasoning skills with principles. To accomplish this, the standards create areas of strong focus in each grade, which are built upon in subsequent years in coherent sequence. Greater mastery of a smaller set of prerequisites enables students to develop their knowledge and reason to solve substantial problems, instead of having a shallow exposure to a vast number of topics. The rigor of the standards demands not only conceptual understanding, procedural skill, and fluency, but an equal focus on the application of mathematical knowledge to prepare students for problem solving outside the classroom.

## Addressing Misconceptions

A number of misconceptions about Common Core are being put forward by a small but vocal group who are concerned about federal intrusion in our locally controlled public education system. It is important to keep in mind that the **development of Common Core was state led**. Common Core simply sets **clear, more rigorous goals** for math and literacy focusing on the skills that matter most. There is **no additional or invasive data collection, and states and school districts maintain local control**, including the right to develop and choose curricula. By clearly stating a more focused set of goals for student learning by grade level, teachers and localities actually have **more flexibility to be creative and responsive** to cultural and community priorities.

## Raising the Bar

Because Common Core will challenge many schools to perform at a higher level, test scores this year—and likely for the next few years—will show a drop in math and reading proficiency. In New York, assessment results were released showing significantly lower proficiency levels than previous years. In response to this sobering news, the state education commissioner emphasized that the scores are not a critique of past efforts, nor do they reflect a decrease in performance. The results are a new, more accurate baseline,

reflecting higher expectations for college and career readiness that today's economy requires. It's important for schools to be ready to learn from the honest picture provided by new test results, rather than becoming discouraged or pointing fingers at the standards themselves. Our children deserve the best and should receive the highest quality foundation for their education. Only by setting clear benchmarks for states and schools can we ensure improvement toward high standards and expectations.

## Worth the Cost

Some are worried that state budgets do not have enough room to cover the costs of the new materials and assessments that Common Core will require. In reality, no matter what the standards are, curricula need to be developed or purchased, teachers need to be trained, and we need to know what our students are learning. By working in cooperation with other states to develop the standards and assessments, states will save money over the long run. However, unless we are willing to invest in setting higher expectations for our students and for our schools, we will never have the skilled workforce we need. One of the key factors that business leaders consider when deciding where to locate is the education level of a community's workforce. It is critical to raise the bar and continue to invest in education; failure to do so will result in disastrous effects for communities.

***"There is no more worthy cause for business leaders than the education of its future workforce. The Common Core State Standards is a commonsense approach to ensuring that our students are prepared to succeed in the workforce and in life. "***

Thomas J. Donohue,  
President and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce

***"Business leaders support Common Core State Standards because they know that students who learn and succeed at school are building a future for themselves and their families. Common Core's rigorous standards and assessments lay the foundation for their success."***

John Engler, President of Business Roundtable and former Governor of Michigan

## Myths and Facts

1. **Myth:** Common Core creates a national curriculum.

**Fact:** Common Core creates only foundational standards in the subjects of math and English language arts. The standards determine what basics a student needs to learn, not how. Curriculum—how students will be taught to these standards—is within the complete control of districts, local school boards, and teachers.

2. **Myth:** Common Core exposes my child’s private data to the government.

**Fact:** Data collection is at the state level, based on laws having nothing to do with Common Core. Implementation of Common Core does not change current practices.<sup>11</sup>

3. **Myth:** Common Core is an overreach by the federal government and a plan to give the Department of Education more control.

**Fact:** These new standards were not Washington’s idea, and the federal government was not involved in their development. They were commissioned by the National Governors Association and state education leaders who acknowledged that the standards in many states were not producing the level of learning required to compete in a global economy. With standards uneven across the country, an A in one state may be equivalent to a C in another. At the time the Common Core State Standards were commissioned, researchers and education policy experts were concerned that some states were lowering their standards and therefore lowering the rigor of state assessments. Doing so enabled more students to be deemed proficient, masking the reality of student performance instead of working toward a solution. Between 2005 and 2009, states made 79 changes to either fourth or eighth grade assessments. Researchers determined that rigor increased in 25 cases, stayed the same in 14, and decreased in 40.<sup>12</sup>

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Will Common Core cost states more?*

The Common Core State Standards should drive down costs in the long run as the education resource marketplace creates economies of scale, due to similarities among states. With consistent standards, teachers will be better able to share creative tools with one another, no matter their home state.

2. *What will the new assessments look like?*

Education experts and state leaders have worked to develop tests that focus on fewer skills that matter most and on the performance of tasks, requiring students to work through extended problems instead of simple multiple choice.

3. *How much of a difference can these higher standards make?*

If U.S. schools are able to raise math performance slightly to around the level of Canada, we would see the annual GDP increase between 7–11% over the next 80 years. It would be equivalent to dumping an extra \$75 trillion into the economy.<sup>13</sup>

4. *How do the Common Core State Standards measure up against those in other countries?*

The standards are internationally benchmarked and have been shown by external audits to be on par with other leading education systems, according to experts like William Schmidt, professor at Michigan State University.<sup>14</sup>

5. *Who wrote Common Core?*

At the urging of the Council of Chief State School Officers (a group composed of state education secretaries and superintendents) and the National Governors Association, leaders and experts gathered around a table in a work group to develop Common Core. These experts included top

educational researchers; experts in literacy, mathematics, and education standards; those with expertise in the assessment of those skills; and teachers from across the country.

6. *Why does the business community support Common Core?*

Business knows the big picture better than any other group—waning international competitiveness, the widening skills gap, and the need to fill positions that will open by the thousands as baby boomers retire. The bottom line is that without internationally benchmarked higher standards for students, workforce quality will not improve. Other countries will continue to outpace America in the classroom and the marketplace for years to come.

7. *What can state chambers do to support Common Core?*

Chamber members from across the country have supported Common Core, using their voices to advocate for our nation's children and their future success. Through op-eds, letters, speeches, and meetings, Chamber members continue to fight for the future of American prosperity and dispel myths that cloud the many benefits of Common Core. In Kentucky, the first state to adopt Common Core, Chamber CEO David Adkisson led a statewide tour to shine a light on the fact that only 38% of Kentucky students were college and career ready. Through Chamber efforts, employer needs were emphasized and communications toolkits were distributed. Throughout the process, the Kentucky Chamber partnered with its members, business executives, and nonprofit advocacy groups to increase the impact.

Kentucky is one model of effectively educating and engaging the business community in the Common Core discussion. The actions of state and local chambers are vital to the fate of Common Core.

## What you can do:

- Sign on to or create a policy statement in support of Common Core and invite members to sign on as well.
- Distribute your Common Core policy statement to members and state legislators.
- Meet with stakeholders in your community.
- Host an event on Common Core in your area.
- Recruit five members as champions of Common Core.
- Publish an op-ed in support of Common Core in your state's newspaper(s) of record.

## Endnotes

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