



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards

Parents are hearing about the Common Core State Standards, also called Common Core Standards, with increasing frequency. Some parents may not yet know about the Common Core State Standards, and others may have questions. They are likely to hear both support for and opposition to CCSS. Since their children will be strongly impacted by this comprehensive U.S. education initiative, Parents for Public Schools believes that parents need information about CCSS so that they can ask their questions and form their opinions. This article will explain the history and reasons for developing Common Core State Standards and will give both pro and con arguments about it.

Since the 1990's, American public education has been impacted by the Accountability Movement, as laws held states to mandatory tests of student achievement. States were allowed to develop their own standards, and standards varied widely among states. In 1996, the nation's governors and some corporate leaders founded Achieve, Inc., a bi-partisan organization, tasked with raising academic standards, graduation requirements, assessments and overall accountability in all 50 states. The American Diploma Project (ADP) was an early leader in developing what we now know as the Common Core State Standards.

As employers and colleges began demanding more of high school graduates, many believed that expectations were falling short of demands and that the skills and knowledge graduates needed for success in college and careers should be better defined, as well as increased. In response to these concerns, in 2009, the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council for Chief State School Officers led a process that culminated in the creation of the Common Core State Standards, beginning with curriculum standards in the areas of literacy and mathematics. An NGA press release announced on June 1, 2009, that the initiative's purpose is to "provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them." The stated purpose of the CCSS is also to make sure American students can compete in a global economy.

The development process for CCSS included teachers, experts in subject matter from around the nation, and input from the public. With benchmarks to the top-performing countries around the



COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS MISSION STATEMENT

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. 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. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Common Core State Standards, National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C., 2010

world, students will be held to the standards from those countries. In addition, students in all states will be held to the same standards, as opposed to states having varying standards. The goal is for these standards to reflect the skills students need in postsecondary education, as well as in the workplace – critical-thinking skills, problem solving, and effective communication skills.

CCSS is not a curriculum but is a set of goals that define what students should know and learn in each grade in English and math. The decisions about how to teach them is left to the local level, so there are no textbooks, curriculum or tools associated with CCSS.

Forty five states are members of the CCSS initiative, with the states of Texas, Virginia, Alaska, and Nebraska not signing on. Minnesota has adopted the English language arts standards but not the mathematics standards. States received additional incentive for signing on to CCSS in 2009 when Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced competitive grants that were available only if states adopted the Common Core State Standards or a similar plan. Funds for the Common Core State Standards were provided by governors and state schools chiefs, and in addition, included funds from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and others.

While there seems to have been a huge momentum to support CCSS with 45 states adopting, in recent months, as the time for implementation has neared, there have been more and more criticisms of the standards. The Governor of Pennsylvania has recently delayed implementation of the standards in his state in order to work with lawmakers on modifications to subject-specific state tests, thereby postponing final legislative approval for CCSS. Several states, including Michigan, Indiana, Alabama, South Dakota, and Georgia, have either opted out after initially signing on, or are considering opting out. Critics are complaining that states have done a poor implementation of CCSS and that students will be tested on the new standards too quickly. In addition, many parents have begun to opt their children out of high stakes testing, including those aligned with Common Core.

Common Core State Standards have enjoyed bi-partisan support over the past few years, and now the criticism is bi-partisan as well, with more opposition coming from Republicans. The Republican National Committee has passed a resolution opposing the Common Core State Standards, saying that it is an affront to states' rights. This argument has traction with those who believe that education should not be driven by the federal government and that it should be much more local to states and individual communities.

Some Democrats now say that the creation and implementation of CCSS did not include enough research, particularly as it pertains to early childhood learning. Some critics say that states did not have much of a choice in signing on to CCSS, while others argue that states



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did indeed have a choice and that they voluntarily signed on. Also at issue is a set of national standards that will create a one-size-fits-all model across the country. States that previously had less stringent standards will see their standards increase. On the other hand, some states that had higher standards will see their standards decrease.

At question now is whether or not the Common Core State Standards will drive quality in education and whether it can be effectively implemented by 2014. Teachers will need extensive help in how to teach with CCSS in place, and they will need a voice in how it is implemented. Some question whether this can happen by 2014, and they argue for a delay. Reversing the implementation will be difficult, and states that signed on have already spent millions of dollars, creating curriculum and tests that align with the standards.

Proponents of the Common Core State Standards believe that they will do what has been promised – elevate students’ skills so that they will be better prepared for college, postsecondary training, and the workforce, while making sure that students across the country are challenged by the same high standards. Common Core State Standards will impact students across the country. The full impact will not be known for a number of years, but it will be a major change for students, families and schools.

As more states have pushed the pause button on CCSS and with some states even reconsidering their position, Secretary Arne Duncan is now giving states more time to meet the deadline to tie the CCSS test results to teacher evaluation.

PPS would like to see high standards in every state and every school, with students receiving the education and skills they need for productive post-secondary lives. We urge the federal government, state governments, and local school boards to continue to work together to implement CCSS in a way that will positively influence the quality of public education. We hope to see the federal government take the time to ensure a quality implementation, with a focus on providing teachers with the curriculum training and professional development needed for such a massive change. In addition, there should be opportunities for parents to learn about CCSS, how the standards will impact their children, and how they can be part of ensuring their success. We urge parents to be proactive and to learn about the Common Core State Standards and to make their voices heard!

PPS provides pros and cons of the CCSS for parents’ consideration.

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