

Key Facts about the Common Core State Standards

What Are the Common Core State Standards?

- **What, not how.** The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) define what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level from kindergarten through grade 12 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. How to reach those standards, including the development and implementation of curriculum to meet the standards, is up to teachers, schools, and school districts.
- **Common expectations.** The CCSS represent the first time that nearly every state has set common expectations for what students should know. In the past, each state has set its own standards, which varied widely. The CCSS have created a new marketplace for the sharing of high-quality resources—many of them free—for teachers and students.
- **College and career readiness.** The CCSS are calibrated to the requirements of first-year college courses and workplace training programs, as well as to the expectations of the highest-performing countries in the world. Students who meet these standards will be ready for postsecondary success in the twenty-first-century global economy.

How Were the CCSS Developed?

- **State-led.** The process of developing the CCSS was led by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Leaders in all but two states agreed to take part in the development process. The federal government had no involvement in the development of the standards.
- **Broad input.** The standards themselves were developed and refined by teams of content experts and teachers. States reviewed multiple drafts and two public comment periods were held, wherein more than 10,000 comments were received and used to help shape the final document. No federal official participated on any work teams or feedback groups.

How Were the CCSS Adopted?

- **Widespread adoption.** Since the release of the CCSS in June 2010, forty-six states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Department of Defense Education Activity have voluntarily chosen to adopt the standards (to date, Minnesota has adopted only the ELA standards). In nearly all cases, state boards of education adopted the standards, just as the state boards adopted previous state standards. In some states, such as Washington and Maine, the state legislatures were required to ratify the boards' decisions.
- **State authority.** All states, regardless of whether they have adopted the CCSS, retain full control over the standards they adopt, the assessments they administer, the curriculum they choose, and the textbooks and other materials they use.

What Changes in Instruction Do the CCSS Call for?

- **Focus, coherence, and rigor.** The mathematics standards focus on a few key standards in greater depth to ensure that students learn them well. They provide a coherent learning path through the grades. They also call for procedural fluency, conceptual understanding, and the ability to apply mathematics to solve real-world problems.
- **Higher expectations.** In ELA, the standards retain substantial attention to literature but also emphasize building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction, which is reflective of the types of texts that students increasingly encounter as they progress in their educational careers. The CCSS also emphasize the importance of students' ability to read carefully and craft arguments based on information and analysis, rather than on mere opinion. The standards seek to reverse an unfortunate decline in the text complexity that students encounter in the classroom. Those demands are increasing in the real world and the classroom needs to reflect that reality.

How Are the CCSS Being Implemented?

- **State efforts.** Most states adopted the standards in 2010 or 2011 and have been working hard for the past two to three years to implement them. First and foremost, teachers are receiving training during the school year and/or during the summer on key instructional shifts inherent in the standards. Teachers have also begun creating, purchasing, and finding free, new, high-quality instructional resources online to support the shift in teaching and learning. While virtually all states expect to have the CCSS fully implemented by the 2014–15 school year, the shift to any set of new academic standards is a multi-year process. This one is significantly underway in most states.
- **New assessments.** Two consortia of states are developing new assessments to measure student achievement against the new standards. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium are the names of two consortia of 20+ states each that are working to develop assessments intended to be a significant improvement over current state tests. Both consortia intend to (1) deliver assessments online, taking advantage of technology to assess students in new, less expensive ways; and (2) use performance tasks, which ask students to apply knowledge to solve extended problems, rather than rely solely on “fill-in-the-bubble” tests. This assessment work is important because the research is very clear that current assessments are in need of an upgrade. Results from a recent RAND Corporation study showed the quality of state assessments to be remarkably low. Specifically, among the seventeen states with available data, fewer than 2 percent of mathematics items and only 21 percent of reading/writing items required higher-level processing and complex analyses.¹ Also, only 3–10 percent of elementary, middle, and high school students were assessed using extended activities that called for complex analyses and the ability to synthesize complex ideas.²

Who Will Decide What Assessments Are Implemented?

- **States.** Each state will decide what assessments are implemented in that state. A state may choose to adopt the assessments being developed by one of the consortia described above, but no state is required to do so by any federal law or under the U.S. Department of Education–approved waivers. Additionally, the federal government has no role in developing specific standards or requiring specific assessment instruments.

Who Supports the CCSS?

Support for the CCSS is strong and broad.

- **Educators.** The 2013 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* reports that 80 percent of principals and 70 percent of teachers are confident that the CCSS will improve student achievement and preparation for college and the workplace.
- **Businesses.** The business community has been strongly supportive of the CCSS since the initiative began and remains actively engaged in supporting it. To express their collective support, more than seventy of the nation's leading chief executive officers placed an advertisement in the *New York Times* this spring.
- **Political leaders.** Current and former elected and appointed officials at the local and state levels offer their full support of the CCSS, including former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.
- **State legislatures.** As noted above, most state legislatures have no purview over the setting of academic standards and never have. However, they have been active in supporting implementation. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, approximately 150 bills related to the CCSS have been offered during 2013 state legislative sessions. Approximately 10 percent of those bills pertain to slowing down or repealing the standards. The overwhelming majority of legislation has dealt with moving to implementation of the CCSS by transitioning to new assessments, instructional materials, etc. To date, only two states—Indiana and Michigan—have passed legislation or budget language that would slow down the implementation of the CCSS. No state has repealed the standards.
- **Obama administration.** Although there was no federal government involvement in the development of the CCSS, President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan are supportive of this effort, and they encouraged—but did not require—states to adopt the standards by giving points on Race to the Top applications based on the adoption of the CCSS. To receive waivers from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, states were required to have college- and career-ready standards; they did not have to adopt the CCSS. Virginia and Minnesota are examples of states that received waivers without adopting the CCSS in both ELA and mathematics.

What Will It Cost to Implement and Maintain the CCSS?

- **Estimates vary.** As with any shift to new standards, there are costs involved to train teachers, develop and purchase materials, implement new assessments, etc. The Pioneer Institute estimates that costs would run \$15.8 billion over seven years for all states. However, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute suggests costs would range from \$3–\$12 billion, depending on the extent to which states take advantage of opportunities associated with technology and cross-state sharing.

Endnotes

¹ Alliance for Excellent Education analysis of tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 within K. Yuan and V. Le, (2012) *Estimating the Percentage of Students Who Were Tested on Cognitively Demanding Items Through the State Achievement Tests* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/working_papers/2012/RAND_WR967.pdf (accessed June 10, 2013).

² Yuan and Le, *Estimating the Percentage of Students Who Were Tested on Cognitively Demanding Items Through the State Achievement Tests*, p. xiv.