



Illinois State Board of Education

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Frequently Asked Questions: Common Core State Standards Implementation

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Division of Public Information, Illinois State Board of Education

1. Q: How will the Common Core State Standards affect students?

A: The Common Core ensures that students receive a quality education regardless of where they live. By establishing a clear set of expectations for what students should know in English language arts and mathematics at the end of each grade level, the Common Core requires that all students meet similarly high standards. The Common Core emphasizes skills that students need to succeed in college and the professional world. Because the Common Core is benchmarked with international standards, students will be well-equipped to compete in today's global economy. Ultimately, the Common Core will better prepare students for postsecondary education and the workforce.

2. Q: How will the Common Core State Standards affect teachers?

A: The Common Core establishes guidelines for what students need to learn, but not how they should learn. Teachers and school administrators will decide how the standards are to be taught and will establish their own curricula to allow for continued flexibility and creativity. Each student has unique needs, and teachers are best positioned to determine how to meet these needs so that students can thrive.

3. Q: How will teachers implement the changes?

A: Teachers and school administrators are working together to implement curricula that meet the new standards. A May 2013 survey of 1300 Illinois teachers indicates that many have already adopted the Common Core standards into their curricula and 80 percent of respondents say that their schools have full implementation plans for the standards, which Illinois adopted in 2010. Schools that have piloted the Common Core find that collaborating on lesson plans and exchanging ideas about what works and what does not have benefitted teachers. Educators find that they already teach many of the skills highlighted in the Common Core; the Common Core just places an even greater emphasis on these skills.

4. Q: How will the Common Core affect English Language Learners (ELLs)?

A: The same Common Core standards that apply to students for whom English is their first language apply to English Language Learners (ELLs). These students may require additional instruction in order to grasp the Common Core standards. The flexibility afforded to teachers to decide how best to instruct their students will be particularly critical for those teaching ELL students, who may require more creative instruction. For more information, please visit <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-for-english-learners.pdf>.

5. Q: How will the Common Core affect Individualized Education Program (IEP) students?

A: The Common Core holds IEP students to the same high standards as non-IEP students and represents a chance to promote a culture of high expectations for everyone. The Common Core acknowledges, however, that IEP students may require additional instruction and support in order to meet these rigorous standards. For more information, please visit <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf>.

6. Q: What are the major differences between Illinois's former learning standards and those of the Common Core?

A: In English language arts, the Common Core standards place a greater emphasis on reading nonfiction, writing analytical essays, and working with more complex texts. These changes will develop students' ability to gather information and use evidence to back their claims while also expanding their vocabularies. Students will continue to read fiction and write creatively, but the Common Core recognizes the importance of nonfiction and analytical writing in teaching students how to be critical readers and persuasive writers.

In mathematics, the Common Core encourages greater depth of instruction on fewer topics within a school year. At the elementary school level, the standards emphasize basic concepts like numbers and operations so that students have mastery of the foundations of mathematics before moving onto more advanced topics in middle school and high school. The hope is that students will be able to apply their math skills to real world problems and challenges.

7. Q: What is the relationship between the Common Core State Standards and the federal government?

A: The Common Core is the result of a state-led initiative and is independent of the federal government. The Common Core is not a nationwide curriculum and states are under no obligation to adopt the Common Core standards. If states voluntarily decide to implement the standards, it is up to local teachers and school administrators to determine how best to instruct students so that they meet the Common Core standards.

8. Q: How is the Common Core funded?

A: Districts can use their general operating budget to help fund the local work to review the standards and ensure that curricula and instruction meets the new ELA and math standards. ISBE has provided many professional development and training opportunities over the past several years to prepare for the Common Core. On a large scale, states may save money by using the Common Core as they share research and resources with one another and implement the standards.

It's important to note that states, including Illinois, have always set learning standards. Our last Illinois Learning Standards were approved nearly 20 years ago. Educators must be teaching to updated standards based on the latest research and information about student learning and college and career readiness benchmarks.

9. Q: Were parents, teachers, and school administrators within Illinois consulted before the state adopted the Common Core?

A: Yes; the state held public meetings in September 2009 and March 2010 in which citizens offered comments and criticisms regarding the Common Core standards. The Illinois State Board of Education took these suggestions into consideration when it provided feedback on multiple drafts of the standards throughout the development process. The state adopted the standards during ISBE's June 2010 Board Meeting.

10. Q: What does adoption of the Common Core standards mean for state testing?

A: In 2013, approximately 20 percent of the reading and mathematics questions on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) tested proficiency in Common Core standards. And in spring 2014, 100 percent of the questions on the ISAT will be written to the Common Core. In 2014-15, Illinois will transition to assessments specifically tailored to the Common Core. This new system will emphasize measuring student progress during the course of a year. The new assessments will also better measure how well students master content and can apply or demonstrate that mastery, better capture students' critical thinking, problem solving skills, creative expression and more characteristics of 21st Century learning that are embedded in the Common Core Standards.

11. Q: Will the state be updating science standards as well?

A: Yes, Illinois is one of 26 lead states that have collaborated on new science standards for students in kindergarten through the 12th grade called the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Like the Common Core, NGSS is rigorous, internationally benchmarked, and intended to better prepare students for college and career. NGSS provides a new way of teaching science and engineering in Illinois' schools. The final draft of NGSS was released in April 2013 and ISBE will review the standards for potential adoption later this year.

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