The Common Core State Standards and Higher Education

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in literacy and mathematics were developed collaboratively and involved 48 states, hundreds of experts, and thousands of teachers.

- Led by the National Governor’s Association center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 48 states along with teachers, content experts, and higher education faculty who sat on writing and review committees were involved in their development.¹


- The significant promise of the CCSS is to prepare all students for college and careers, ready to contribute and compete with students from around the world in the 21st century global economy.

- Across the states, students are held to the same expectations, regardless of zip code, mitigating challenges with student and teacher mobility.

The Common Core Standards for mathematics and literacy are anchored in the goal of ensuring all students graduate ready for college and careers, and reflect the knowledge and skills most valued by employers and higher education.

- The CCSS define what all students need to know and be able to do upon graduating high school to be well–prepared for continuing their education – either in college or in a workforce training program. Based on a nationally representative survey of postsecondary faculty, when asked if the standards as a whole were sufficiently challenging to prepare students for their classes, nearly 96 percent of respondents said they were.²

- The Common Core represent a baseline of the academic knowledge and skills that all students need to pursue college and careers. They are aligned to college– and career–ready expectations; as students learn and demonstrate the standards they will find themselves on track to graduating fully prepared for their next steps.

• We can’t successfully prepare students for college and careers unless we set the right expectations and goals. Standards are necessary but not sufficient; they provide the necessary foundation for local decisions around curriculum, instruction, assessments, and conditions for learning.

A Shift in Teaching and Learning

Shifts in Literacy

In reading, the major advances are the shift away from literature-focused standards to a balance of literature and informational texts to reflect college- and career-ready expectations. There is also a greater focus on text complexity and at what level students should be reading.

In writing, there is a strong emphasis on argument and informative/explanatory writing, along with an emphasis on writing about sources or using evidence to inform an argument.

The Common Core also include speaking and listening expectations, including a focus on formal and informal talk, which can be done through presentations and group work. The language standards put a stress on general academic and domain-specific vocabulary.

A final major shift in the Common Core from most current academic standards is that they address reading, writing and literacy across the curriculum, and include literacy standards for science, social studies and technical subjects. These standards complement rather than replace content standards in those subjects, and are the responsibility of teachers in those specific disciplines, making literacy a shared responsibility across educators.

Shifts in Mathematics

In mathematics, the first major advance is around how they are organized. The CCSS emphasize coherence at each grade level - making connections across content and between content and mathematical practices in order to promote deeper learning. In addition, the standards focus on key topics at each grade level to allow educators and students to go deeper into the content.
The standards also emphasize *progressions* across grades, with the end of progression calling for *fluency* – or the ability to *perform calculations or solving problems quickly and accurate*.

The Common Core also include *Standards for Mathematical Practice* which describe *mathematical thinking*, and aim to foster reasoning, problem solving, modeling, decision making, and engagement among students. These eight standards connect with content standards in each grade and are the same across grades K–12.

**What About New Assessments?**

California is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced), one of two federally funded consortia developing new assessments aligned to the CCSS. You may learn more about California’s participation in Smarter Balanced and subscribe to the California Department of Education Smarter Balanced listserv at [http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/smarterbalanced.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/smarterbalanced.asp).

**Transitioning to the CCSS: What the Higher Education Community Can Do Now**

The higher education community can help lay the groundwork for a smooth transition to the new standards in the following ways:

- Participate in local P–21 collaboratives to better understand the shifts in instruction expected by the CCSS and discuss implications for higher education arts and science faculty. Build on existing local K–12/University partnerships to strengthen programs and offer students multiple pathways to increased success.

- Align higher education curriculum with the CCSS (by revising placement policies and curricula of first year courses that act as bridges between K–12 and college majors).

- Represent the voice of higher education in support of equity and access for college preparedness and in the development of CCSS–aligned assessments.

**Resources for Higher Education**
