

# Common Core State Standards Initiative

**A Note to Our Partners:** Thank you for your support of the Common Core State Standards. Your work on behalf of this initiative will be critical to the standards' adoption process. The contents of this toolkit are intended to guide you in your advocacy efforts. We have included messaging materials that provide all of the information you will need to know about the standards and the strongest arguments in support of their adoption. You will also find a series of sample documents. Please note that these should be modified to include information that is relevant to you and your audience. All of the partners in this initiative bring a unique perspective to the table, and it is important that this comes through in our collective effort.

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## Background on the Initiative

Governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia (D.C.) have committed to developing a common core of state standards for proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO).

The standards, developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and education experts, establish clear and consistent goals for learning that will prepare our children for college and the workforce. The NGA Center and CCSSO have received feedback on the drafts from national organizations representing, but not limited to, teachers, postsecondary educators (including community colleges), civil rights groups, English language learners, and students with disabilities.

These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. States will be asked to adopt the Common Core State Standards in their entirety and include the core in at least 85% of the state's standards in English language arts and mathematics.

The standards:

- Are aligned with college and workforce expectations;
- Are clear, understandable and consistent;
- Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards;
- Are informed by standards in other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society; and
- Are evidence-based.

The CCSSI initiative produced two sets of standards: college and career readiness standards, which were released for public comment in September 2009 and K-12 standards, which were released for public comment in March 2010. The final standards will be released in June 2010.

An advisory group provides advice and guidance on the initiative. Members of this group include experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### General

#### What are educational standards?

Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning.

#### Why do we need educational standards?

We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in post-secondary education and the workforce. Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. They will also provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students.

Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have in order to build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms. Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success. Standards are a first step – a key building block – in providing our young people with a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college and work. Of course, standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they do provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

#### How are educational standards determined now?

Today, each state has its own process for developing, adopting, and implementing standards. As a result, what students are expected to learn can vary widely from state to state.

#### Is having common standards the first step toward nationalizing education?

No. The Common Core Standards are part of a state-led effort to give all students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The federal government has not been involved in the development of the standards. Individual states will choose whether or not to adopt these standards.

#### What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is a state-led effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics that states can share and voluntarily adopt. The standards have been informed by the best available evidence and the highest standards across the country and globe. They were designed by a diverse group of teachers, experts, parents, and school administrators, so they reflect both our aspirations for our children and the realities of the classroom. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

#### Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?

We want to make sure that children across the country are given the tools they need to succeed. High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations so that everyone can work

toward together. This will ensure that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here at home, but also with students around the world, maintaining America's competitive edge.

These standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.

Of course, standards cannot single-handedly improve the quality of our nation's education system, but they do give educators shared goals and expectations for their students. For example, the standards will enable participating states to work together to:

- Make expectations for students clear to parents, teachers, and the general public;
- Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the Common Core State Standards that will replace the existing testing systems that too often are inconsistent, burdensome and confusing; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

#### **Who is leading the Common Core State Standards Initiative?**

Parents, teachers, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders, through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), have led the effort to develop a common core of state standards.

In addition, CCSSO and the NGA Center have provided public comment periods for all stakeholders to submit feedback on the draft standards documents. Those comments were incorporated into the final standards.

#### **How will states adopt the Common Core State Standards?**

The process of state standards adoption depends on the laws of each state. Some states will adopt the standards through their state boards of education, while others will adopt them through their state legislatures.

#### **Will the Common Core State Standards keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?**

No. Common core standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

#### **Were teachers involved in the creation of the standards?**

Yes. Teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. The National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations have been instrumental in bringing together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback on the standards.

### **Does having common standards lead to dumbing down the standards across the board?**

Not at all. The Common Core Standards have been built from the best and highest state standards in the country. They are evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and are informed by other top performing countries. They were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom. Far from looking for the “lowest common denominator,” these standards are designed to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, are learning what they need to know to graduate from high school ready for college or a career.

### **Will more standards mean more tests?**

No. Having one set of standards will make it easier for states to pool information and resources to develop a shared set of high quality tests to better evaluate student progress. The goal is not to have more tests, but to have smarter and better tests that help students, parents, and teachers.

## **Process**

### **What makes this process different from other efforts to create common standards?**

This process is different because it is state-led, and has the support of educators across the country as well as prominent education, business, and state leaders’ organizations, including CCSSO, the NGA Center, Achieve, Inc, ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the Hunt Institute, the National Parent Teacher Association, the State Higher Education Executive Officers, the American Association of School Administrators, and the Business Roundtable.

### **Are these national standards?**

The federal government was NOT involved in the development of the standards. This has been a state-led and driven initiative from the beginning. States will voluntarily adopt the standards based on the timelines and context in their state.

### **Who or what entity determined the Common Core State Standards?**

CCSSO and the NGA Center have been leading the standards’ development process in consultation with teachers, parents, experts and administrators. To ensure that this process was open, inclusive, and rigorous, several working groups and committees were formed. They included the:

- Standards Development Work Group - responsible for determining and writing the standards.
- Feedback Group - provided information backed by research to inform the standards development process by offering expert input on draft documents.
- Validation Committee – nominated by states and national organizations and selected by a group of 12 governors and chiefs who hold leadership positions at NGA Center and CCSSO. These independent, national education experts reviewed the standards to ensure they meet the development criteria.

Members of the work and feedback groups are listed at [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org). The approval process for the standards also included public comment periods during which anyone who was interested in the standards could submit their comments for review.

### **By what criteria were the standards developed?**

The standards were developed by the following criteria:

- Aligned with expectations for college and career success;
- Clear, so that educators and parents know what they need to do to help students learn;
- Consistent across all states, so that students are not taught to a lower standard just because of where they live;
- Inclusive of both content and the application of knowledge through high-order skills;
- Built upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations;
- Realistic, for effective use in the classroom;
- Informed by other top performing countries, so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society;
- Evidence and research-based.

Criteria have been set by states, through the national organizations CCSSO and the NGA Center.

### **What grade levels are included in the Common Core State Standards?**

The English-language arts and math standards are for grades K-12. Research from the early childhood and higher education communities have also informed the development of the standards.

### **What does this work mean for students with disabilities and English language learners?**

Common standards will provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices within and across states that can lead to an improved ability to best serve young people with disabilities and English language learners. Additionally, the K-12 English-language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English language learners and students with disabilities.

### **Why are the Common Core State Standards for just English language arts and math?**

English-language arts and math were the first subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they teach skills upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes.

### **Do these standards incorporate both content and skills?**

Yes. Both content and skills are important and have been incorporated in the Common Core State Standards. One of the criteria by which the standards have been evaluated is whether or not they include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order thinking skills.

## **Implementation and Future Work**

### **What will the Common Core State Standards mean for students?**

The standards will provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning across the country. Currently, every state has its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students at the same grade level in

different states may be expected to achieve at different levels. This initiative will allow states to share information effectively and help provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of where they live. Common standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students, but they will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning. In a global economy, students must be prepared to compete with not only their peers in the next state, but also with students from around the world.

### **How will the standards impact teachers?**

The standards will provide important goals for teachers to ensure they are preparing students for success in college and the workforce. They will help teachers develop and implement effective strategies for their students by providing benchmarks for skills and knowledge that their students should have by the end of the year. The standards will help colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers; provide the opportunity for teachers to be involved in the development of assessments linked to these top quality standards; allow states to develop and provide better assessments that more accurately measure whether or not students have learned what was taught; and guide educators toward curricula and teaching strategies that will give students a deep understanding of the subject and the skills they need to apply their knowledge.

### **Will the Common Core State Standards be updated?**

Yes. There will be an ongoing state-led development process to continuously improve the standards.

### **Will common assessments be developed?**

Like adoption of the standards, it will be up to the states: some states plan to come together voluntarily to develop a common assessment system, based on the Common Core State Standards. A state-led consortium on assessment would be grounded in the following principles: allow for comparison across students, schools, districts, states and nations; create economies of scale; provide information and support more effective teaching and learning; and prepare students for college and careers. Instructional materials and curricula are key components to making standards usable and real in the classroom.

### **Will CCSSO and NGA Center be creating common instructional materials and curricula?**

States that adopt the standards may choose to work together to develop instructional materials and curricula. As states join together to adopt the same common core, publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards. Working together will allow states the opportunity to share best thinking and practices as well as pool resources in their efforts to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to successfully implement these standards.

### **What is the role of the federal government in standards implementation?**

The federal government has had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards; however, they will have an opportunity to support states as they begin adopting the standards. For example, the federal government can:

- Support this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to implement the standards.
- Provide long-term financial support for the development and implementation of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, and research to help continually improve the standards over time.
- Revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from the best of what works in other nations and from research.

## Myths vs. Facts

### Content and Quality: General

**Myth:** *Adopting common standards will bring all states' standards down to the lowest common denominator, which means states with high standards, such as Massachusetts, will be taking a step backwards if they adopt the Standards.*

**Fact:** The standards were designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college and careers. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The standards are informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and expertise about educational outcomes. We need college and career ready standards because even in high-performing states students are graduating and passing all the required tests and still require remediation in their post-secondary work.

**Myth:** *The standards are not internationally benchmarked.*

**Fact:** International benchmarking played a significant role in both sets of standards. In fact, the college and career readiness standards include an appendix listing the evidence that was consulted in drafting the standards and the international data consulted in the benchmarking process.

**Myth:** *The standards only include skills and do not address the importance of content knowledge.*

**Fact:** The standards recognize that both content and skills are important. In English-language arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.

### Content and Quality: Math

**Myth:** *The standards do not prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the 8th grade, as many states' current standards do.*

**Fact:** The standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th grade, by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in 8th grade. At the same time, grade 8 standards are also included; these include rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively into a full Algebra 1 course.

**Myth:** *Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.*

**Fact:** The mathematical progressions presented in the common core are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem

with having 50 different sets of state standards is that today, different states cover different topics at different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. What is important to keep in mind is that the progression in the Common Core State Standards is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

## Content and Quality: English Language Arts

**Myth:** *The standards suggest teaching Grapes of Wrath to 2nd graders.*

**Fact:** The ELA Standards suggest Grapes of Wrath as a text that would be appropriate for 9th or 10th grade readers. Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The Common Core State Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

**Myth:** *The standards are just vague descriptions of skills; they don't include a reading list or any other similar reference to content.*

**Fact:** The standards do include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been very well received. This provides teachers with the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use – while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

**Myth:** *English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.*

**Fact:** With the Common Core ELA Standards, English teachers will still teach their students literature as well as literary non-fiction. However, because college and career readiness overwhelmingly focuses on complex texts outside of literature, these standards also ensure students are being prepared to read, write, and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines are also focusing on reading and writing to build knowledge within their subject areas.

**Myth:** *The standards don't have enough emphasis on fiction/literature*

**Fact:** The standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world, America's Founding Documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

## Process

**Myth:** *No teachers were involved in writing the standards.*

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create a thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

**Myth:** *The standards are not based on research or evidence.*

**Fact:** The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In English-language arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In Mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that the traditional US mathematics curriculum must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of a curriculum that is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

## Implementation

**Myth:** *The standards tell teachers what to teach.*

**Fact:** The best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That’s why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

**Myth:** *The standards will be implemented through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – signifying the federal government will be leading them.*

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of NCLB and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the Recovery Act or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint were released because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government.

**Myth:** *These standards amount to a national curriculum for our schools.*

**Fact:** The standards are not a curriculum. They are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

## Talking Points

### General

#### The Standards

- Today, we have different academic standards in every state, and too many states have standards that do not prepare student for college or careers.
- The Common Core State Standards will provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so that teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.
- Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live, and allow states to more effectively help all students succeed.
- With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together for shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.
- The Common Core State Standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in both college and work.
- When American students have the skills and knowledge needed in today's jobs, our communities will be positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.
- The best understanding of what works in education comes from practice and experience. That's why the standards are being developed by the states – not the federal government – and they incorporate the best and highest of the current state standards.
- And the best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That's why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

#### The Process

- The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort to establish consistent and clear education standards for English-language arts and mathematics so students will be prepared for success in today's world.
- The initiative was launched over a year ago by state leaders through their membership in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center).
- Both organizations believe that the states are best positioned to lead the process of establishing education standards that all states can voluntarily share.
- The process used to write the standards was designed to ensure that the standards were informed by:
  - The best state standards;

- The experience of teachers, content experts, states and leading thinkers; and
- Feedback from the general public.
- To write the standards, the NGA Center and CCSSO brought together content experts, teachers, researchers and others.
- The standards have been divided into two categories:
  - college and career ready graduation standards, which address what students are expected to learn when they have graduated from high school; and
  - K-12 standards, which address expectations for elementary through high school.
- The draft college and career ready graduation standards were released for public comment in September 2009.
- The draft K-12 standards were released for public comment in March 2010.
- The NGA Center and CCSSO received nearly 10,000 comments from the public on the standards and experts have worked to incorporate that feedback for the final release.
- Next, the NGA Center and CCSSO worked with experts to ensure that the K-12 standards are aligned with the college and career ready standards.
- Finally, a validation committee of experts reviewed the standards and determined that they will prepare students for college and career,
- From there, each state that chooses to adopt will follow the process that their individual state uses to determine their educational standards.

## Math

- The standards stress not only procedural skills but also conceptual understanding, to make sure students are learning and absorbing the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels - rather than the current practices by which many students learn enough to get by on the next test, but forget it shortly thereafter, only to review again the following year.
- The K-5 standards provide students with a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals--which help young students build the foundation to successfully apply more demanding math concepts and procedures, and move into applications.
- In kindergarten, the standards follow successful international models and recommendations from the National Research Council's Early Math Panel report, by focusing kindergarten work on the number core: learning how numbers correspond to quantities, and learning how to put numbers together and take them apart (the beginnings of addition and subtraction).
- The K-5 standards build on the best state standards to provide detailed guidance to teachers on how to navigate their way through knotty topics such as fractions, negative numbers, and geometry, and do so by maintaining a continuous progression from grade to grade.
- Having built a strong foundation K-5, students can do hands on learning in geometry, algebra and

probability and statistics. Students who have completed 7th grade and mastered the content and skills through the 7th grade will be well- prepared for algebra in grade 8.

- The middle school standards are robust and provide a coherent and rich preparation for high school mathematics.
- The high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically.
- The high school standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, by helping students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel situations, as college students and employees regularly do.
- The high school standards emphasize mathematical modeling, the use of mathematics and statistics to analyze empirical situations, understand them better, and improve decisions.

## English Language Arts

### Reading

- The standards establish a “staircase” of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college-and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read.
- Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective. Because the standards are building blocks for successful classrooms, but recognize that teachers, school districts and states need to decide on appropriate curriculum, they intentionally do not offer a required reading list. Instead, they offer numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect at the beginning of the year.
- The standards mandate certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, and seminal works of literature. The standards appropriately defer the many remaining decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, and schools.

### Writing

- The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing—a basic form of argument—extending down into the earliest grades.
- Student research—both short, focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and longer term in depth research —is emphasized throughout the standards but most prominently in the writing strand since a written analysis and presentation of findings is so often critical.
- Annotated samples of student writing accompany the standards and help establish adequate performance levels in writing arguments, informational/explanatory texts, and narratives in the various grades.

## Speaking and Listening

- The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media.
- An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

## Language

- The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.
- The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.
- Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation, but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

## Media and technology

- Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the 21st century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards.

## Post-Adoption

### Implementation

- The federal government has had no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards and will not have a role in their implementation.
- It is vital that this initiative remain state-led and to that end, the NGA Center and CCSSO have convened a group of standards experts to begin to lay out a potential governance structure for the future of the CCSSI that will ensure continued state leadership.
- The NGA Center and CCSSO are also working to create an implementation guide that would assist states as they move from adoption of the standards to implementation. The guide will draw from best practices and research.

### Assessment

- Like adoption of standards, the development of common assessments will be up to the states.
- Some states plan to come together voluntarily to develop a common assessment system, based on the Common Core State Standards.
- State-led consortia on assessment would be grounded in the following principles: allow for comparison

across students, schools, districts, states and nations; create economies of scale; provide information and support more effective teaching and learning; and prepare students for college and careers.

- The consortia on assessment are focused on developing richer, more authentic evaluations of student learning, not more assessments.
- The nation's governors and chief state school officers believe these new standards offer an unprecedented opportunity for states to work together to dramatically improve the quality, cost-effectiveness, and comparability of state assessments.
- CCSSO and the NGA Center are playing a key role in facilitating a series of conversations with leaders of the state consortia that already had formed to seek Race to the Top funds. We anticipate these discussions will continue on how best to come to an agreement on common action on this important issue.

### **Professional Development**

- Teachers know that effective professional development is essential to realize the promise of the standards.
- There are many groups actively engaged on this issue and professional development has been an important part of the implementation.

### **Curricula**

- States that adopt the standards may choose to work together to develop instructional materials and curricula. As states join together to adopt the same common core, publishers of instructional materials and experienced educators will develop new resources around these shared standards.
- Working together will allow states the opportunity to share best thinking and practices as well as pool resources in their efforts to ensure that teachers have the tools they need to successfully implement these standards.
- The NGA Center and CCSSO convened internationally recognized experts to discuss the implications for curriculum and how our two organizations could best support districts and states.
- These are all part of a broader ongoing series of conversations that will enable the NGA Center and CCSSO to best support meaningful and effective implementation of the Common Core.

### **How the Federal Government Can Help with Post Adoption Issues**

- Offer a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, support a revised state accountability structure, and offer financial support for states to implement the standards.
- Provide long-term financial support for the development and implementation of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, and research to help continually improve the Common Core State Standards over time.
- Revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from the best of what works in states, other nations and from research.

### **Next Subjects**

- Currently the focus of the NGA Center and CCSSO is on producing the best possible standards in English-language arts and math and implementing a state-led structure for governing the standards. CCSSO and the NGA Center are discussing developing common core state standards in other content areas in the future.

## Guide to Suggested Activities

### Website

- Create a short video about the CCSSI and put it on your website
- Sign up as a Core Standards Supporter
- Put the video PSA on your website
- Put a link to [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) on your websites

### Press Outreach

- Submit letters to the editor
- Submit op-eds
- Pitch your newspaper's editorial board
- Hold an event with students and parents in your state to talk about the importance of common standards
- Organize a meeting with business leaders to talk about how common standards help competitiveness

### Government Outreach

- Organize petitions to send to state government officials involved in the adoption process
- Write letters to state government officials involved in the adoption process

## Video Vignettes Guide

As we build momentum for the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, we are rolling out a new online community called the Core Standards Supporters (CSS), located on [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org), designed to highlight the deep breadth of support for the standards. The CSS website will ideally catalogue a series of video vignettes that will feature leaders of partner organizations, teachers, administrators, governors and other key stakeholders. These videos are intended to be promotional tools that we may use on the CCSSI website, distribute in communications and incorporate into presentations. In these vignettes we intend to showcase the broad base of support that exists for the state standards and the critical role of educators, parents and elected officials in this process.

The following proposed questions and messaging points are offered to guide your brief, on-camera interview if your organization is able to participate in this effort. These vignettes should run between 15-45 seconds. Beyond inquiring about your organization's specific role and perspective, we hope that your presentation will answer some or all of the following questions.

The videos should film someone talking about the CCSSI from his or her perspective. The talking points below are just guidance for you as you record the video, but it is your voice and your unique perspective on the initiative that is most important. We do not suggest having someone ask the questions on camera, rather, we hope you will incorporate the answers into your short presentation.

### **Why does your community support the standards initiative?**

- Please articulate why your community supports CCSSI, but also refer to the attached message guidance to inform your presentation.

### **Why do we need educational standards?**

- We need standards to ensure that all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in postsecondary education and the workforce.
- Common standards will help ensure that students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state.
- Common standards will provide a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices within and across states that will improve our ability to best serve the needs of students.
- Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have so that teachers can build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms.
- Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success. Standards are a first step – a key building block – in providing our young people with a high-quality education that will prepare them for success in college and work.
- While standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

### **Why is the Common Core State Standards Initiative important?**

- We want to make sure that all children across the country are given the tools they need to succeed.
- These standards are a common sense first step toward ensuring our children are getting the best possible education no matter where they live.
- High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that everyone can work toward together. This will ensure that we maintain America's

competitive edge, so that all of our students are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to compete with not only their peers here at home, but also with students from around the world.

- While standards cannot single-handedly improve the quality of our nation's education system, they do give educators shared goals and expectations for their students. For example, the Common Core State Standards will enable participating states to work together to:
  - Make expectations for students clear to parents, teachers, and the general public;
  - Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
  - Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the Common Core State Standards that will replace the existing testing systems that too often are inconsistent, burdensome and confusing; and
  - Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

## Sample Letters to the Editor

### **Responding to accusation of federalizing education:**

Re “Article title”:

Your article is wrong to characterize the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) as a federal initiative, when it is in fact a state-led effort started by governors and chief state school officers across the country.

The federal government has not been involved in the standards’ development, nor has it mandated their adoption. Rather, the standards were created by teachers, researchers, content experts, and leaders in the education community, and were also informed by thousands of public comments. Each state will individually decide whether to adopt them.

The CCSSI does not put forth a national curriculum or assessment. It simply offers a shared set of clear, high quality goals and expectations to help our students succeed in college and careers.

### **Responding to accusation of dumbing down standards:**

Re “Article title”:

Your article mistakenly claims that the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) will force some states to lower their already high academic standards. This is not the case.

In fact, CCSSI looked at the strongest standards across the country and took those lessons to create a single, clear, and consistent set of academic expectations for all students across the country. The standards are designed by teachers, parents and experts to build upon the most advanced current thinking about how to best prepare students for college and careers.

Since the CCSSI first began more than a year ago, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The standards’ aim is precisely the opposite- to help students in all states be as prepared as they possibly can be for success in their post-high school endeavors.

### **Responding to positive article or editorial:**

Re “Article title”:

I applaud your recent piece about the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) and the promise it holds for improving education across the country.

This state-led initiative puts forth clear, robust academic standards to be voluntarily adopted and shared among states. The process by which they were developed – which included teachers, content experts, researchers and nearly 10,000 public comments – ensures that they will raise the bar in every state and bring all students up to the same high level of achievement, regardless of where they live. The standards will provide parents and teachers with a distinct set of academic benchmarks for each grade level, enabling them to most effectively help their students.

It is now up to the states to do the right thing by adopting the Common Core State Standards and preparing all students for success in college and beyond.

## Sample Editorial Board Pitch

Dear [insert name],

More than a year ago, governors and state commissioners of education from 48 states, 2 territories and the District of Columbia committed to developing a common core of high quality academic standards in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. In this rare and refreshing demonstration of bipartisanship, this state-led effort, known as the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI), will culminate early next month with the unveiling of the highly anticipated final standards. We hope that [name of paper] will join the chorus of support for this common sense step toward improving education for all of our nation's children.

The CCSSI is a critical first step to reforming our education system. It will allow parents, teachers and students to know what to expect from each academic year while eliminating the high level of disparity in education quality between states by holding all students to a shared set of robust academic standards. It will also prepare our students to be academically competitive as they enter into a global workforce.

The initiative has been spearheaded by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), who convened a working group of teachers, researchers, and content experts to collaboratively create the standards. Over the last year, the standards have been improved by thousands of comments and suggestions submitted by teachers, students, parents, and other important members of the education community.

The CCSSI has also benefitted from the advice and guidance of an advisory group whose members include experts from Achieve, Inc., ACT, the College Board, the National Association of State Boards of Education and the State Higher Education Executive Officers.

These standards are evidence-based and informed by the best models across and country and around the world. They are designed to build upon the most advanced thinking about how to best prepare students for success in college and careers, ensuring that they will raise the bar and improve education across the board.

As a premier newspaper in the [insert community name] community, [insert newspaper name] is in a unique position to inform and educate the public about the Common Core Standards. As such, we would welcome the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful conversation with the Editorial Board as the adoption process moves forward. Please let me know if you and your colleagues are interested in meeting with top members of the CCSSI's leadership team.

To schedule a convenient time for a call, please contact me at [insert phone] or [insert email].

Sincerely,

[insert name]

## Sample Op-Ed

### INTRODUCTION:

*Business Leader:*

As communication, commerce, and technology continue to advance at a rapid rate, so too do the skills necessary to be competitive in the global workforce. In order to keep pace, America's children must be prepared no matter where they live or where they go to school. Right now, we are falling short. The academic standards our students must meet vary widely from state to state, leaving our students at a competitive disadvantage just as their adult lives begin.

*Teacher:*

To be sure, America's teachers face many challenges in effectively preparing our children for success. Every once in a while, an innovative approach comes along that helps ease some of that burden. The Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSSI) proposed by the nation's governors and chief state school officers is one such innovation. Too often, teachers across the country begin the school year without a clear understanding of what students should know when they finish the year because there is not a clear and consistent set of standards to guide our lesson planning. Equally disturbing, the expectations of students in one state are often vastly different than the expectations for students in a neighboring state [customize for specific state]. The CCSSI addresses both of those problems by proposing a single set of standards for every student in the country. This is a common sense, state-led effort that will help me in my classroom as well as other teachers across the country.

*Civil Rights Leader:*

It is our responsibility as a nation to ensure that all of America's public school children receive a high quality education, no matter who they are or where they live. Every student should graduate high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to attend college and be prepared for a career. Unfortunately, that's not happening and one of the reasons is that parents and teachers lack of clarity about what students should be learning each year. Equally counterproductive is the wide gap in academic standards from state to state. Too often, the students that suffer most are disproportionately African American and Latino and live in low-income communities in states with low academic standards. We could go a long way toward correcting this imbalance if all schools adopted shared high academic standards so all of our children can get the skills they need to succeed at whatever they choose to pursue.

*Parent:*

Everyone knows that a multitude of factors go into whether or not a child will succeed in school – it takes dedicated teachers, hard working administrators, adequate resources, and a rich curriculum, at a minimum. But in order for parents to play their part in doing the best job possible to support their child's academic life, they must know what to expect from their kids at end of each academic year. Right now, this is a difficult feat. The academic standards our students must meet vary from state to state, are constantly changing and are often poorly understood by teachers, administrators and parents.

### BODY:

High academic standards, shared across states, are an important first step in ensuring that all of America's students have the tools they need for success. Fortunately, forty-eight governors from across the country have signed on to the Common Core State Standard Initiative (CCSSI), which establishes a single, clear set of K-12 mathematics and English-language arts standards that states can share and voluntarily adopt. This state-led effort draws from the best models within the U.S. and around the world to ensure that when our nation's children graduate from high school, they are ready for college and ready for a career.

Spearheaded by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), these standards reflect the collaborative work of educators, researchers, and experts in the education community, and are also informed by thousands of public comments. Teachers have played a key role in this effort from day one, ensuring that the standards reflect the realities of the classroom. Since work began more than a year ago,

the standards have undergone a thoughtful and rigorous drafting process and a robust public comment period in order to maximize their practicality and effectiveness.

These standards do not tell teachers how to teach, nor do they attempt to override the unique qualities of each student and classroom that make learning fun and interesting. They simply establish a strong foundation of knowledge that all students need for success after graduation. It is up to schools and teachers to decide how to put the standards into practice and measure their students' progress.

Consistent standards will provide high quality academic benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live. They offer an accessible roadmap to education with clear and realistic goals for achievement that remain constant, even if a student enters kindergarten in one state and graduates in another. This clarity will help both parents and teachers know what they need to do to help students reach their highest potential.

Over time, the standards will also increase the efficiency of our education system by providing states with a greater opportunity to share experiences and best practices. This will allow important and often costly undertakings, such as curriculum and assessment development, to be streamlined, so that all fifty states do not have to separately invest time and money toward accomplishing the same goals.

## **CONCLUSION:**

### *Business Leader:*

While standards are not a panacea for fixing all of the deficiencies in our education system, they are a critical first step in building a strong foundation for reform. With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together for shared goals, we can help ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.

### *Teacher:*

With clear, shared expectations for achievement, educators across the country will be best positioned to help their students succeed. Every September, teachers can hit the ground running, with all students on the same page and working toward common goals.

### *Civil Rights Leader:*

No child should enter life at a competitive disadvantage simply because of where she lives. Students in every classroom across the country deserve the best chance to succeed in college and the workforce. Clear, shared, and high standards for all students are a critical step toward establishing the high quality education system that is worthy of a great nation.

### *Parent:*

In order to provide their children with the best possible support system, parents must be able to understand the academic expectations for each grade level. With the Common Core Standards, states have the opportunity to make this a reality, enabling students across the country to work with their teachers and parents toward graduating from school fully prepared for success in college and careers.

## Sample Petition

Dear [insert name],

Please improve education in [insert state] by approving the Common Core State Standards, a set of clear, robust academic benchmarks, developed by teachers and education experts – and informed by nearly 10,000 public comments – through an initiative spearheaded by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers.

Sincerely,

[for each signee: Name, Email, Zip code]

## Sample Letter to Government Official

Dear [insert name],

As you work to improve education in [insert state], I urge you to support the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI). By establishing clear, robust academic benchmarks, the standards will enable students, with the help of parents and teachers, to best prepare for success in college and careers.

As you know, the CCSSI is a state-led effort, spearheaded by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), to produce high quality K-12 English-language arts and mathematics standards. Drafted by teachers, content experts, and leading thinkers in the education community – and informed by nearly 10,000 public comments and the best models from states in the U.S. and countries around the world – these standards are now in their final form and hold great promise for improving education in this state and across the country.

They do not tell teachers how to teach. There are no mandated curricula or assessments. They simply raise the bar for what students should know at each stage in their academic careers. The standards' clarity and practicality will also best position parents and teachers to help students every step of the way.

Furthermore, over time, the standards will provide states with a greater opportunity to share best practices, increasing the efficiency of our education system as a whole.

When it comes time to approve the Common Core State Standards for [insert state], I hope that you will make the smart choice and provide our students and their families with the first-rate education they deserve.

Sincerely,

[insert name]