

TOP 10

Things Parents Need to Know About the Common Core Standards

New educational standards, called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), are being implemented in all California public schools. The CCSS are a set of consistent, high-quality academic goals in English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The standards define the knowledge and skills all students should master by the end of each grade level in order to graduate from high school fully prepared to enter college and the workforce.

#1 The goal of the CCSS is college and workforce readiness for all students. As students progress through the grades, they will build the skills and knowledge they will need to be prepared for college-level coursework and the demands of the 21st century workplace. Students will receive an education that not only leads to a high school diploma, but also to success in college, career, and life after graduation.

#2 States led the effort to develop the CCSS, not the federal government. The nation's governors and education commissioners collaborated with teachers, researchers, education experts, and members of the higher education and business communities to design and develop the standards. Individual states were able to choose if they wanted to adopt the CCSS and, to date, a total of 46 states have done so.

#3 The CCSS are not a curriculum and do not tell teachers how to teach. Educational standards, like the CCSS, provide the foundation for a curriculum — establishing what students need to learn, but not dictating how the standards should be taught. In California, State education experts and teachers have worked to determine the essential skills and knowledge that students must know and be able to do to meet each standard. This framework will help teachers create lesson plans, guide their instruction, and tailor how they teach the standards to the specific needs of their students.

#4 Better standards call for better assessments. New tests are being developed to measure the critical content and skills of the CCSS. California is part of a consortium of states, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), working together to develop a common set of tests aligned to the CCSS. The SBAC assessments will test writing skills in each grade, as well as critical thinking and problem solving skills. Students will take the new assessments on computers, allowing teachers to see test results quickly and adjust classroom instruction to the needs of their students.

#5 The CCSS focus on 21st century skills. The CCSS emphasize the development of skills — like problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity — that are vital to success in college and today's workplace. They also allow students to apply their learning to real-world situations that simulate the type of work they may do in the future.

#6 The CCSS create consistent learning goals for all students regardless of where they go to school. Prior to the development of the CCSS, each state developed its own educational standards and, as a result, expectations for student learning have varied widely from state to state. With the CCSS, parents can be assured that their children are learning the same rigorous academic standards as other students across California and across the country. Having consistent standards also provides students, parents, and teachers with a clear understanding of what students should be learning in each grade level.

#7 The CCSS are aligned to college and workplace expectations. The CCSS reflect the knowledge and skills most valued by employers and higher education. Leaders in the higher education and business communities played a valuable role in the development of the CCSS — providing insight on the learning most needed by students entering college and the workforce. Students who master the standards will be on track to graduating from high school fully prepared for their next steps.

#8 The CCSS are benchmarked against academic standards from the world's top-performing countries. In today's global economy, competition for jobs comes not just from across the country, but spans the globe. Students must be prepared with the skills and knowledge to compete with their peers here at home as well as students from around the world. Development of the CCSS was informed by the academic standards from a number of high achieving countries, such as Japan and Singapore.

#9 The CCSS call for changes in learning for ELA and mathematics. In English language arts (ELA), students will read more complex nonfiction and fiction texts. They will learn to create written arguments using evidence from multiple texts and to gather evidence to defend their opinions. In middle and high school, students will apply their literacy skills to mathematics, science, social studies, and technical subjects — learning to read and write well in all subjects.

In mathematics, students will develop a foundation of mathematical skills and learning from kindergarten through 12th grade, giving them the building blocks to understand why and how math works in the real-world. Students will still memorize math facts, but they will also be asked to show their understanding by explaining in writing how they solved math problems.

#10 The CCSS delve deeper into core concepts. The CCSS ask teachers and students to dig deeper into the core skills and concepts at each grade level, focusing on the most important topics that students need to know. Teachers will have more time to cover subjects in greater detail and help students master critical skills and develop a deeper understanding of key concepts.