

A Parent's Guide to the Common Core Standards

by Samantha Cleaver

Currently, each state has a separate set of education standards, lists of skills that students are expected to do by the time they graduate each grade. However, in response to concerns about American student achievement and just how prepared students are for college and careers, education leaders in 48 states, along with the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), have written a set of standards for student across the U.S. The common core state standards were released in 2010. Now, 44 states are working to implement them by 2013-2014. Here's what you should know and how to help your child prepare for the common core:



The Common Core Standards are State-Driven

- The common core state standards are a set of learning skills that all American students should achieve, not a federal curriculum. They set the benchmarks and guidelines for what each student should learn, not how or what teachers teach.
- Parent Tip: Find out if your state has adopted the common core at the [common core standards web site](#).

The Standards are a Progression

- In general, standards set a progression of skills that students learn as they move through school. Kindergarteners work on phonics and letter sounds, while eighth graders work on building vocabulary and reading fluency.
- Parent Tip: Look through the common core standards to get a feel for what your child will be learning as he moves through school. Read the [English-language arts standards](#) and the [math standards](#) at the common core web site.

Students will Delve Deeper into Core Concepts

- One complaint about separate state standards was the concern from teachers that students were learning about too many topics in a year to fully understand them, says Carrie Phillip, CCSSO program director of common core standards implementation. The common core state standards, on the other hand, focus on the most important topics that students need to know. In math, that

means that students focus on really understanding numbers in elementary school before they start to apply that understanding of numbers to data in middle school.

- Parent Tip: As your child completes homework, help them hone in on the most important aspects and core concepts.

The Reading Standards will Get More Difficult

- As the common core is implemented, students will be expected to read more difficult text sooner, and discuss what they read at a more complex level. For example, instead of pulling out individual text elements, such as characters, plot, and setting, students will be reading or listening to various stories, and will compare stories using their understanding of text elements.
- Parent Tip: As you read with your child, ask her in-depth why and how questions that encourage her to analyze and synthesize texts. For example, read three different versions of the Goldilocks and the Three Bears and ask your child to compare and contrast them as you read. Also, as you build your child's library, see [Appendix B](#) for book ideas.

Focus on Informational Text

- To prepare students for college-level work, there will be more of a focus on informational and expository text. In middle school especially, students will be reading informational text, including original documents, from the Declaration of Independence to presidential speeches.
- Parent Tip: Encourage your child to research a topic he's interested in using informational texts and original documents.

Assessments Will Change

- Compared to current achievement tests, common core assessments will likely be more difficult. Ideally, instead of multiple choice tests, students will be analyzing and synthesizing information, writing essay responses, and answering in-depth questions to show how much they understand.
- Parent Tip: Ask your child to explain or show how they're solving problems. Then, have them think of multiple ways to solve a math problem, or answer a reading discussion question.

Focus on Practical Skills

- The common core standards were designed with the workplace in mind. So, students will be working on taking the role of scientists, historians, researchers, and more. For example, says Bill McCallum, co-author of the standards and professor at the University of Arizona, the standards "describe what a mathematical practitioner does, make sense of problems, persevere and solve them, and critique the reasoning of others."
- Parent Tip: As your child works through his homework, ask him how someone might use what he's working on in "real life." Help connect thinking in school to thinking at work by explaining how you solve problems, or use math every day.

As the common core state standards start to be implemented in schools, there will be some changes, but many things will stay the same. The most important aspect, as always, is to stay in contact with your child's teacher to find out how you can support this latest educational advancement at home.