

Common Core State and National Standards Come to North Carolina Schools

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North Carolina public school students - and their parents - have heard it before: A curriculum change is coming. This time, however, the change aligns with one that 44 other states, the District of Columbia, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands are also making. The internationally benchmarked Common Core State Standards are coming to a public school near you.

Adopting a new, national K-12 math and English language arts curriculum may unnerve students,

parents and possibly teachers, but state and local education administrators say it's crucial.

"We live in a mobile society now," says Maria Pitre-Martin, director of curriculum and instruction for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. "Having a more consistent set of common standards provides a level playing field. All of our teachers will now be asked to provide students with the same level of instruction - a more consistent level."

North Carolina adopted the CCSS in June 2010. While most states started integrating some aspects of the standards into classrooms last year, NCDPI used that time to train teachers, align assessments and purchase resources. Now North Carolina is one of only a few states fully implementing all standards in public school classrooms this school year.

"Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students regardless of where they live and allow states to more effectively help all students succeed," says Magda Parvey, assistant superintendent for instructional services for Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools.

Educators believe students who meet the new standards will be college-ready and employable nationwide.

Math: More Focused and Coherent

The CCSS for mathematics moves away from a curriculum that is "a mile wide and inch deep" and toward fewer standards that "aim for clarity and specificity," according to the "Common Core State Standards for Mathematics" introduction.

"The current set of math standards we have is every extensive and very thick," Pitre-Martin says. "Now the standards will be developed across grade levels at a higher level of rigor each year, so by the time (students) are ready to exit, they have a better knowledge of the subject."

Common Core math is "enticing," says Ruth Steidinger, senior director of middle school programs for Wake County Public Schools. "More time is spent building depth of knowledge as opposed to building knowledge that is less

substantive."

English and Language Arts: Integrated and Informational

The CCSS for English language arts will also be integrated into reading and interpreting history/social studies, science and technical subjects starting at grade 6. For students in grades K-5, these subjects will be integrated into reading lessons. The standards are "intended to be a living work," so as new and better evidence emerges, the standards will be revised accordingly, the "Common Core Standards for English Language Arts" introduction states.

Other Subjects Also Changing

The Common Core State Standards increase academic rigor for students in math and language arts. But North Carolina educators also wanted to strengthen the curriculum for other subjects as well, so they developed the North Carolina Essential Standards, which focus on science, social studies, information and technology skills, career and technical education, the arts, healthful living and world languages.

"The North Carolina Essential Standards were adopted by our state and are for all content areas, so everybody is getting a new shift," Steidinger says. "Every single teacher is going to feel like a first-year teacher next year."

Tests, Training and Benchmarks

To prepare teachers for the new standards, NCDPI developed Race to the Top Professional Development Teams of people who specialize in all content areas. These teams attended summer institutes and regionally based training in the fall and spring, as well as specific subject-based sessions. The purpose, Pitre-Martin says, was to place content experts in each district who would, in turn, train teachers there.

Pitre-Martin says NCDPI began implementing the N.C. Teacher Evaluation Instrument and Process two years ago to track teachers' performance and is in the process of developing "measures of student learning" or MSLs, that will provide teachers and administrators with data about how students are learning.

The standards will afford educators "more opportunities to collaborate, share and network," says Teresa Daye, Durham Public Schools executive director for curriculum, instruction and assessment. "As we develop our professional development plan for this school year, we are infusing blended professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators throughout the year."

How will end-of-grade and end-of-course tests change as a result of adopting the CCSS? Pitre-Martin says North Carolina public schools will test students with modified EOGs and EOCs that align with the new standards until 2014-15, when the state will adopt final versions of the tests that a consortium of several states, including North Carolina, are collaborating on. This group, called the Smarter Balanced Assessments Consortium, aims to develop valid, reliable and fair next-generation assessments aligned to the CCSS that all participating states can use consistently.

"The Common Core State Standards promise rigorous standards and consistency from state to state," Parvey says.

"The 21st century skills embedded in the Common Core will promote students' ability to think at higher levels, reflect, analyze, influence, evaluate and communicate."

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Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

The three main changes in the CCSS for English language arts are:

- Grounding reading and writing in evidence. Students will be required to support what they're writing about and will answer more text-dependent questions.
- More regular practice with complex text and vocabulary. Teachers will collaborate on lesson plans to make this happen.
- Building knowledge through nonfiction and informational text. Students will continue reading fiction and novels, but there will be an increased emphasis on reading nonfiction and informational text.

Students who meet the CCSS for English language arts will:

- Demonstrate independence.
- Build strong content knowledge.
- Respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline.
- Comprehend as well as critique.

- Value evidence.
- Use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
- Come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

Common Core State Standards for Math

The three main changes in CCSS math are:

- Narrowed focus. Students will more deeply explore the concepts emphasized in the standards.
- More coherence. Students will link major topics throughout the grades.
- Redefined rigor. Rigor is defined as conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application.

The eight standards for mathematical practice require that students be taught to:

- Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
- Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
- Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
- Model with mathematics.
- Use appropriate tools strategically.
- Look for and make use of structure.
- Attend to precision.
- Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

For More Information

Find details about local school system implementation read [Common Core Customized: Triangle School Districts Implement State Standards](#) and [Common Core Customized: A guide to Math Course Names](#).

Also find more information about the Common Core State Standards at the following websites:

- Common Core State Standards: corestandards.org
- NCDPI CCSS and North Carolina Essential Standards wiki page: ncdpi.wikispaces.net
- State testing calendar: dpi.state.nc.us/accountability
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: smarterbalanced.org

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