



Colorado Academic Standards Frequently Asked Questions

The Colorado Academic Standards define what students are expected to learn in each subject and grade. The standards for each grade level are designed to build to the next so that all Colorado students have the academic knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and career when they graduate. This document contains frequently asked questions and answers about the Colorado Academic Standards.

Colorado Academic Standards Overview

What are educational standards?

Educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be on course toward college or career readiness by providing clear goals for student learning at each grade level. Standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers decide how best to help students reach the standards. Put another way, standards are not a curriculum (lesson plans); it's up to school districts to design curricula that aligns to the standards.

What are the Colorado Academic Standards?

The Colorado Academic Standards are the expectations of what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade. They also stand as the values and content organizers of what Colorado sees as the future skills and essential knowledge for our next generation to be more successful. All Colorado districts are required to adopt local standards that meet or exceed the Colorado Academic Standards. The Colorado Academic Standards are also the basis of the annual state assessment.

How were the Colorado Academic Standards developed?

Senate Bill 08-212, Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids, called for the development of rigorous standards delineating what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade to be college and career ready. In 2009, the Colorado Department of Education engaged Colorado educators in a year-long process to update its academic standards in English language proficiency and 10 content areas: comprehensive health and physical education; dance; drama and theater arts; mathematics; music; reading, writing, and communicating; science; social studies; visual arts; and world languages.

The Colorado State Board of Education adopted the Colorado Academic Standards in 2009. Then, in 2010, after closely comparing the Colorado Academic Standards with the Common Core State Standards, the state board adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. The comparison showed that the Common Core State Standards reflected Colorado's focus on college and

Office of Standards and Instructional Support

Background/Timeline

- **2008** Colorado Legislature enacts Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids mandating revised preschool through high school standards
- **2008-2009** Hundreds of Coloradans author and provide feedback on the new standards in ten content areas
- **Dec. 2009** Colorado State Board of Education (SBE) adopts the Colorado Academic Standards
- **Aug. 2010** Colorado SBE adopts the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) to be incorporated into Colorado's Mathematics and Reading, Writing, and Communicating standards
- **Dec. 2010** Colorado SBE adopts the improved Colorado Academic Standards for Mathematics and Reading, Writing, and Communicating which include the CCSS
- **2011-2013** Colorado school districts and teachers prepare for implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards
- **2013-2014** Full implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards begins



career readiness, the values of the Colorado educators who developed the original Colorado Academic Standards and they also reflected more rigorous and clear expectations than the Colorado Academic Standards. With the Common Core State Standards incorporated for English language arts and mathematics, the Colorado Academic Standards stand as the values and content organizers of what Colorado sees as the future skills and essential knowledge for our next generation to be more successful.

What content areas are included in the Colorado Academic Standards?

Colorado has updated academic standards in 10 content areas for preschool through 12th grade: music; visual arts; drama and theatre arts; dance; comprehensive health and physical education; mathematics; reading, writing, and communicating; science; social studies; and world languages. In addition, the state has developed Extended Evidence Outcomes aligned to the standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Colorado also adopted Colorado English Language Proficiency (CELP) standards to support English language learners.

What part of the Colorado Academic Standards is Common Core?

The Colorado Academic Standards for reading, writing, and communicating and for mathematics incorporate the Common Core State Standards.

What supports for the Colorado Academic Standards are available for teachers/districts as they implement the new standards?

More than 700 curriculum samples based on the Colorado Academic Standards and developed by Colorado educators are available here. Utilizing a Colorado-designed and refined template, the samples provide organizing structures for addressing the grade-level expectations, evidence outcomes and 21st Century Skills that build students' mastery of the standards at each grade level. As voluntary resources for districts, the samples represent the translation of the Colorado Academic Standards into unit overviews for all 10 content areas, grades k-12. Illuminate possibilities for sequencing grade-level and content-specific standards across courses/years offer one possible foundation for exploring standards-based unit and lesson-plan development. The samples, the blank template upon which they are based, and a template with definitions were created by and for Colorado educators as a way to understand and translate the state standards into curriculum. Districts can utilize the samples and blank template as starting points for the creation of their own curricula, as examples to build upon and augment, as crosswalk documents for curricular comparisons, and other purposeful and individualized uses. Users of the samples should feel free to copy, distribute and transmit the samples and to adapt them to fit their needs. In addition, for each of the content areas, the Standards and Instructional Support website offers content-specific information on free resources that can support the implementation of the standards. The website also provides up-to-date information on some significant instructional resources (and means of accessing additional resources) for the successful implementation of the Common Core State Standards (mathematics and reading, writing, and communicating) fully included in the Colorado Academic Standards.

Common Core State Standards Overview

What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states can voluntarily choose to adopt. To date, 45 states and the District of Columbia have chosen to adopt the CCSS. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two or four year college programs or enter the workforce. The standards are clear and concise to ensure that parents, teachers and students have a clear understanding of the expectations in reading, writing, speaking and listening and mathematics.

**How did the Common Core State Standards initiative come about?**

For decades, students in different states have been taught different material at different rates and held to radically different standards. Several years ago, a small group of governors joined together in an effort to align their states' standards and assessments. This group expanded through the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. In 2007, content experts began to develop the new Common Core State Standards. Drafts were circulated among the states, comments were received and the standards were adjusted. In fact, Colorado was one of only six states asked to provide feedback on the Common Core State Standards in the development process. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input into the development of the standards. So far, 45 states and the District of Columbia have signed up to implement these new expectations.

Who leads the Common Core State Standards initiative?

The nation's governors and education commissioners, through their representative organizations the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers led the development of the Common Core State Standards and continue to lead the initiative. Teachers, parents, school administrators and experts from across the country together with state leaders provided input into the development of the standards.

How do the Common Core State Standards benefit students?

The world has changed. The careers of today and tomorrow value postsecondary education and training more than ever. U.S. students are competing for jobs not just across county lines, but across state lines and our borders. The Colorado Academic Standards, with the Common Core State Standards included, are critical to the business community because they were designed to prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow. High standards that are consistent across states promote common learning experiences in a mobile society and provide teachers, parents and students with a set of clear, common expectations that are aligned to the expectations for college and career success. The standards provide common expectations within and across states ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the U.S. and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to every state in the country, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies, including: development of textbooks, digital media and other teaching materials aligned to the standards; development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance annually that will replace existing state testing systems; changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards

Were teachers involved in developing the Common Core State Standards?

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 the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together.

Are the Common Core State Standards research or evidence based?

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. The studies indicate that the traditional U.S. 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."

**Are the Common Core State Standards internationally benchmarked?**

Yes, international benchmarking played a significant role in development of the standards.

Are the Common Core State Standards part of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort that is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of the standards is in no way mandatory or required by the federal government. States began the work to create clear, consistent standards before the Recovery Act or the Elementary and Secondary Education Act blueprint was released because this work is being driven by the needs of the states, not the federal government. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are offering support by developing a State Policymaker Guide to Implementation, facilitating opportunities for collaboration among organizations working on implementation, planning the future governance structure of the standards and convening the publishing community to ensure that high quality materials aligned with the standards are created.

Will the federal government take over ownership of the Common Core State Standards?

The federal government will not govern the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The Initiative was and will remain a state-led effort. The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers are committed to developing a long-term governance structure with leadership from governors, chief state school officers and other state policymakers.

What guidance do the Common Core State Standards provide to teachers?

The Common Core State Standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students need in English language arts and mathematics at each grade level to ultimately be prepared to graduate college and career ready. The standards establish what students need to learn, but they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

How do the Common Core State Standards compare to previous state standards?

The Common Core State Standards were written by building on the best and highest state standards in existence in the U.S., examining the expectations of other high performing countries around the world, and careful study of the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and careers. No state in the country was asked to lower their expectations for their students in adopting the Common Core. The standards 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. Additionally, Colorado had grade banded standards (standards stretching over more than one grade level) until 2009. Incorporating the CCSS allowed for clearly articulated grade level expectations.

What does this work mean for students with disabilities and English Learners?

The Common Core State Standards give states the opportunity to share experiences and best practices, which can lead to an improved ability to serve young people with disabilities and English Learners. Additionally, the standards include information on application of the standards for these groups of students. In addition, the state has developed Extended Evidence Outcomes aligned to the standards for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Colorado also adopted Colorado English Language Proficiency (CELP) standards to support English language learners.

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

English language arts and math were the subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they are areas upon which students build skill sets which are used in other subjects. They are also the subjects most frequently assessed for accountability purposes. However, with the Colorado Academic Standards, Colorado has created aligned, rigorous standards in a total of 10 content areas for preschool through 12th grade: music; visual arts; drama and theatre arts; dance; comprehensive health and physical education; mathematics; reading, writing, and communicating; science; social studies; and world languages.

Common Core English Language Arts and Literacy Standards

Do the Common Core State Standards abandon classic literature and focus too heavily on non-fiction?

The Common Core State Standards includes classic literature and works of fiction while encouraging increased exposure to informational texts and literary nonfiction. The goal is to have children read challenging texts that will build their vocabulary and background knowledge, a strategy grounded in what education scholar E. D. Hirsch has shown: A broad, content-rich curriculum reduces the achievement gap between the middle class and the poor. Common Core suggests that, as a student progresses through the grades, the nonfiction proportion of materials should increase until, by the end of high school, it represents 70 percent of total reading across all of their classes in all subject areas. The increasing focus on informational texts explicitly prepares students to be college and career ready giving them the skills to read and understand textbooks and texts encountered in the working world. The standards explicitly warn that English teachers “are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts.” These informational texts include foundational documents of American history, science lab reports, instruction manuals and works of thought leaders like Emerson and Thoreau.

Do the Common Core State Standards for English language arts address the importance of content knowledge or only address skills?

The Common Core State 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. In the early grades, foundational research based reading skills are also emphasized. 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.

Do the Common Core State Standards have enough emphasis on fiction/literature?

The standards require specific 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.

Do the English language arts standards include a reading list or any other reference to content?

The Colorado Academic Standards, which include the Common Core State Standards for English language arts, do not require specific reading texts for students. What students read in Colorado classrooms is determined by local districts and the discretion of teachers. The only place in the Common Core State Standards where texts are referenced are at the high school level, and they are listed as examples. In addition, the producers of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts have made available three auxiliary documents which Colorado did not adopt.



Common Core Mathematics Standards

Are the Common Core mathematical standards rigorous?

Mathematical content dominates the K–12 expectations. Unlike many of the older state standards, Common Core demands “automaticity” (memorization-based knowledge) with basic math facts, mastery of standard algorithms and understanding of critical arithmetic. These essential math skills are not only required but given high priority, particularly in the early grades. The math standards focus in depth on fewer topics, and ones that coherently build on one another over time. The Common Core math standards articulate 10 math “practices” that promote students’ ability to apply their learning to real world contexts, skills necessary for success in college and career.

Do the Common Core State Standards for mathematics address the importance of content knowledge or only address skills?

The Common Core State Standards recognize that both content and skills are important. 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.

Do the mathematical standards cover all the key math topics in the proper sequence?

The mathematical progressions presented in the Common Core State Standards are coherent and based on evidence. Part of the problem with having 50 different sets of state standards is that 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.

Student Privacy

Are there data collection requirements associated with the Common Core State Standards?

There are no data collection requirements of states adopting the Common Core State Standards. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the Common Core State Standards does not require data collection.

Do the new assessments that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards provide individual student data to the federal government?

The U. S. Department of Education does not, and will not, request or collect personally identifiable information and it is not legally authorized to create a student-level database. As stewards of the taxpayers' funds, the U. S. Department of Education collects basic project information—such as aggregate research results—to evaluate the progress the grantees are making.

Will a national student database and students' personal information be collected?

The U. S. Department of Education does not collect personally identifiable information at all except as required for mandated tasks such as administering student loans and grants and investigating individual complaints. The U. S. Department of Education is not legally authorized to create a national, student-level database and has no intention to create a student records data system at the national level.

**Did the U. S. Department of Education institute changes to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) to pave the way for the Common Core State Standards?**

The 2011 amendments to FERPA regulations did not require states to adopt the Common Core State Standards, nor did they make any changes to those standards. The amendments did provide greater clarity and guidance to states and researchers in the protection of student privacy.

Are the Common Core State Standards being used to collect biometric data about children?

The Common Core State Standards initiative does not collect or require the collection of any biometric data. Common Core has no connection to the BRAIN (Brain Research through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies) Initiative, a recently-proposed scientific endeavor to map the brain.

Will student data be hosted "in the cloud" and will commercial entities be allowed to mine that data to market products to students?

While some schools and districts may independently contract with third-party data or technology firms that use cloud services, each school and district is still the owner of that information, and such a decision would have no connection to the federal government. Under FERPA, this data may not be shared with any third party (commercial entity) or used for any purpose without prior consent from the school or district for a specific purpose allowed under FERPA. These specific, allowable purposes do not include marketing products or selling items directly to students.

Assessments Aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards

Will there be tests aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and the Common Core State Standards?

Yes. Meaningful and relevant assessments work hand in hand with rigorous academic standards. Assessments provide ongoing measures of student learning at each grade level. The data from assessments is critical in determining if educational goals are being met and if students are on track to graduate prepared for college and career. The Colorado Academic Standards are the foundation for the state assessments in science, social studies, English language arts and mathematics. The state assessments are called – Colorado Measures of Academic Success.

What state test is being developed for science and social studies?

New state science and social studies assessments measuring the Colorado Academic Standards were administered online in Colorado for the first time in the 2013-14 school year. These assessments were developed collaboratively by the Colorado Department of Education; the assessment contractor, Pearson; and Colorado educators. Elementary (4th grade social studies and 5th grade science) and middle school (7th grade social studies and 8th grade science) assessments were administered in the spring of 2014. High school (12th grade science and social studies) assessments will be administered in the fall of 2014. For more information, visit our Assessment FAQ page.

What test is being developed English language arts and mathematics?

States that adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics are currently collaborating to develop common assessments that will be aligned to the standards. Colorado is a governing member of a multi-state assessment consortium called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Involvement in this consortium allows the Colorado Department of Education staff, along with staff from the Colorado Department of Higher Education and Colorado educators, to collaborate with individuals from across the U.S. to develop common assessments for English language arts and mathematics. Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, these new computer-based assessments will be administered in grades



3-11 for English language arts and in grades 3-8 with three high school assessments for mathematics. Assessments in each content area will be administered in two components: a performance-based assessment administered after approximately 75 percent of the school year and an end-of-year assessment administered after approximately 90 percent of the school year. For more information, visit our Assessment FAQ page: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment>.

Where can I learn more?

- The Office of Standards and Instructional Support website: www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction
- The Assessment Unit website: www.cde.state.co.us/assessment