



Common Core in Education—What is it? Why Do I Need to Know?

DID YOU KNOW



To be a responsible educator, you must have some knowledge about the Common Core standards, what they involve, and the ability to interpret and apply them in your teaching practice if your state has adopted them.

As an educator, you have heard reference made to the phrase ‘common core’. In most states, it is the foundation for the education teachers are responsible for providing. It can be described as an effort to try and raise the level of performance of students and to make it so that everyone is *college ready* (“CR”) when they graduate high school. For those who are new to substituting, or if you are a retired former teacher re-entering the workforce as a substitute, the concept of common core may not be fully clear to you. In this article we’ll review some basic information about Common Core (“CC”), provide some examples, and link to some resources where you can learn more. This is by no means a “guide” or “how to” for Common Core. Rather, consider it an introduction to the topic and how you, as a substitute educator, may be impacted by it.

What is “Common Core”?

The Common Core is an effort to establish a common set of “standards” for all public schools in all states. The state-led effort to develop Common Core standards was launched in 2009 and have been adopted by different states since 2011. As of January 2018, 42 states have adopted the Common Core standard in some form. States routinely review their academic standards and may choose to change or add onto the standards to best meet the needs of their students.

During the development process, the standards were divided into two categories:

- First, the college- and career-readiness standards, which address what students are expected to know and understand by the time they graduate from high school
- Second, the K-12 standards, which address expectations for elementary school through high school

Educational standards are the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Education standards,

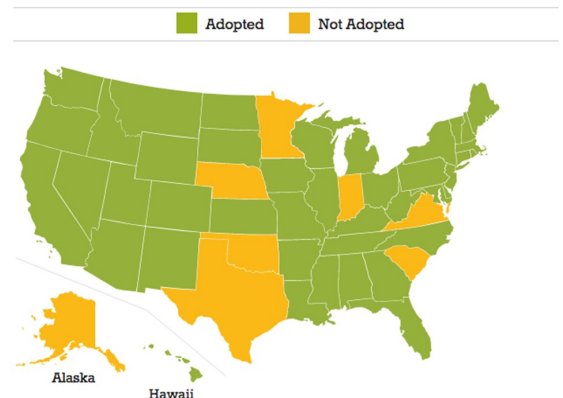
like Common Core are not a curriculum. Local communities and educators choose their own curriculum, which is a detailed plan for day to day teaching. In other words, the Common Core is what students need to know and be able to do, and curriculum is how students will learn it. The Common Core State Standards are educational standards for English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics in grades K-12.

English Language Arts/Literacy Standards

Mathematics Standards

The following page in this article includes some graphics which help explain Common Core by interpreting an example of two of the standards.

For more information about Common Core including which states have adopted it and when, go to <http://www.corestandards.org>



Common Core Structure

Essentially, Common Core says that by the end of 1st grade, for example, all students should be able to count to a certain number, add, multiply, divide, know fractions and be able to read a chapter book (text). Besides education standards, it standardizes things like homework and tests. The standards are broken down for each grade level with appropriate standards (competencies) and expectations.

Proponents of Common Core suggest that high standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are purported to be aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students are well prepared to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad.

Critics of common core point to the governments involvement in its creation, (Why should the federal government essentially establish the standards for a state and local level school?) and the perception that scarce and valuable student funding dollars are being manipulated in the process. Critics further suggest that with standardized homework and tests, the teachers no longer actually construct the materials and that this lack of ownership limits their effectiveness. Finally, the Common Core math, in particular, is quite different than what students of previous generations learned making it difficult for parents of school-aged children to understand.

Regardless of your feelings about common core, the fact remains that it is in place in most areas of the United States. In order to be a responsible educator, you must have some knowledge about the standards, what they involve, and the ability to interpret and apply them in your teaching practice if your state has adopted them.

To illustrate one of the common core standards, consider the graphic below which is a Math standard example for Kindergarten children. The *Domain* is "Counting and Cardinality". It is made up of 7 different *Standards*. The first one being labeled Common Core Level "A.1" which defines success as being able to count to 100 by ones and by tens. "A.2" and "A.3" are detailed as well. Note that there are additional standards that make up this domain – they are "B.4", "B.5", "C.6", and "C.7". Teachers construct lessons that allow young children to effectively master each "standard" (task) within the "domain" (Broadly defined category).

Kindergarten » Counting & Cardinality

Standards in this domain:

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.1	CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.2	CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.3
CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.B.4	CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.B.5	CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.C.6
CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.C.7		

Know number names and the count sequence.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.1

Count to 100 by ones and by tens.

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.2

Count forward beginning from a given number within the known sequence (instead of having to begin at 1).

CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.K.CC.A.3

Write numbers from 0 to 20. Represent a number of objects with a written numeral 0-20 (with 0 representing a count of no objects).

As students' progress through elementary and middle school, the domains remain largely similar while the standards increase in complexity. While the standards set grade-specific goals, they do not define how the standards should be taught or which materials should be used to support students. States and districts recognize that there will need to be a range of supports in place to ensure that all students, including those with special needs and English language learners, can master the standards. It is up to the states to define the full range of supports appropriate for these students.

Common Core Structure— English Language Arts

Source: Council of Chief State School Officers ([link](#))

The ELA Standards are organized into three main sections: a comprehensive K–5 section; and two content area–specific sections for grades 6–12, one for ELA and one for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. In addition, three appendices accompany the main document.

Each section is divided into strands. The K–5 and 6–12 ELA Standards have Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands. The 6–12 history/ social studies, science, and technical subjects section have Reading and Writing strands only. The Reading strand has two components: Reading Literature and Reading Informational Texts. Additionally, in grades K-5 there are Reading Foundational Skills standards, which are directed toward fostering students’ understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the English writing system.

Each of the strands (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language) is linked to a strand-specific set of College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards. These anchor standards are identical across all grades and content areas. Although the Standards are divided into strands, they should be seen as an integrated approach to literacy in which cross-strand teaching occurs. Similarly, research and media skills are embedded throughout the ELA Standards rather than treated in a separate section.

Standards for each grade within K–8 and for grades 9–10 and 11–12 follow the CCR anchor standards in each strand. Each grade-specific standard corresponds to the same-numbered CCR anchor standard, providing grade-appropriate end-of-year expectations. The example below illustrates how the college and career anchor standards relate to the ELA standards.

English Language Arts Standards » Anchor Standards » College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

The K–5 standards on the following pages define what students should understand and be able to do by the end of each grade. They correspond to the College and Career Readiness (CCR) anchor standards below by number. The CCR and grade-specific standards are necessary complements—the former providing broad standards, the latter providing additional specificity—that together define the skills and understandings that all students must demonstrate.

Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 1

Standards in this strand:

RL.1.1 | RL.1.2 | RL.1.3 | RL.1.4 | RL.1.5 | RL.1.6 | RL.1.7 | RL.1.8 | RL.1.9 | RL.1.10

Key Ideas and Details

- RL.1.1. Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
- RL.1.2. Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
- RL.1.3. Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Individual CCR anchor standards can be identified by their strand, CCR status, and number (R.CCR.1, in the example above, represents Standard 1 under key ideas and details). Individual grade-specific standards can be identified by their strand, grade, and number (or number and letter, where applicable), so that RL.1.1, in the example above, stands for Reading, Literature, grade 1, standard 1.



Key Resources for this article:

CoreStandards.org

Council of Chief State School Officers ([link](#))