

## Common Core State Standards

### **Introduction**

Although often connected to the federal government's "Race to the Top" grant program, the development of the Common Core was originally part of a collaborative effort between state education chiefs and governors in 48 states. Today, over 46 states have voluntarily adopted the standards, turning over the decisions about implementation including curriculum development, resources, and teacher support to the state and local level. The idea is to adopt a rigorous new set of educational standards that would prepare students for college and career in an ever-more competitive global marketplace. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce supports the Common Core State Standards.

### **Common Questions about the Common Core State Standards**

1. *What is the federal government's involvement? Is this a national curriculum for our schools?*

First, the Common Core is not a curriculum. It is set of goals and expectations that will help students be college and career ready. Teachers, principals, superintendents and others in each school district make decisions about how students actually meet the standards. Teachers continue to write their own lesson plans and structure instruction to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms.

The federate government played no role in the development of the Common Core. This is a state-led initiative with long-term governance that includes chief state school officers, teachers, principals, and other education policy-makers.

2. *Who wrote the Common Core Standards?*

Teachers and standard experts from across the country, including the National Education Association (NEA), American Federation of Teachers (AFT), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), among other organizations.

3. *What about the Race to the Top? Didn't it require states to adopt the Common Core in order to get more money?*

The federal government gave a competitive edge in the Race to the Top grants to states that demonstrated the adoption of college and career ready standards. It did not specify that states must adopt the Common Core. Many states chose to adopt the Common Core because they believe it will prepare their students for the future.

4. *What about Minnesota?*

Minnesota has adopted the Common Core English Language Arts Standards portion of the standards and has added supplementary content. Minnesota schools have been implementing these standards since the 2012-13 school year. Minnesota refers to its standards as Minnesota Academic Standards because they supplemented them.

5. *Doesn't the Common Core bring all states' standards down to the lowest common denominator? Doesn't that mean that Minnesota, which traditionally has had higher standards, is going to have to have to take a backwards step?*

The Common Core standards are based on current, well-researched thinking about what our students need to learn to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It incorporates the highest international standards and expertise. States like Minnesota with higher standards will move to the next level. No state will have to lower its standards.

Minnesota has not adopted the Common Core Math Standards in part because it had already revised its mathematic standards in 2007 and legislative action would be needed if the state were to adopt the Common Core standards prior to its next scheduled revision in 2015. Most importantly, the revised Minnesota mathematic standards are thought by most to be more rigorous than the Common Core. Because our students are already more successful than other states, (Minnesota is ranked second in the country), the state is confident in its decision to stay with the legislative-approved mathematics standards.

6. *How are the Minnesota Academic Standards different than other standards?*

Minnesota Academic Standards are very similar to other standards aligned with career and college readiness such as from ACT. The English Language Arts Standards identify what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college and in careers. They include teaching in six areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening and the essential rules of standard written and spoken English and vocabulary development.

7. *Does the Common Core mandate a specific curriculum or what materials students read?*

No, Common Core identifies what students need to know and be able to do to be successful at college or in careers. They do not mandate a specific curriculum, instructional strategies or textbooks and materials. At STMA, we have our own curriculum review and decision-making process.

8. *What are the English Language Arts Standards at STMA?*

You can go to the district website and see the standards and academics. The link is:

<http://www.stma.k12.mn.us/academics/curriculum/content-area/language-arts>

9. *Did it cost more to implement the Minnesota Academic Standards?*

No, STMA revises its curriculum in each content area once every seven years so implementation of the standards was included in the regular curriculum review process.

10. *Doesn't this mean our students will be tested more often?*

The Common Core does not establish testing requirements. The State of Minnesota requires school district to administer MCA assessments. The amount of time spent assessing students' overall knowledge in state required online tests is expected to stay the same. What will change is the rigor of the tests as the Common Core is harder and more demanding.

11. *I read that some people are opposed to the Common Core Standards. What does STMA believe?*

Some states and schools may be responding differently than STMA. We have not changed our process for implementing a locally determined curriculum. When we implemented the new standards at STMA, we followed the same process as we have in the past with other new standards and curriculum reviews. There was no change in the process or in teaching with the Minnesota Academic Standards, just a change in the standards which has happened several times over the course of the last 20 years. Teachers continue to participate in the curriculum review process as well as in the selection of materials from publishers and other sources. The district determines how best to teach so that students are proficient on the standards.

Minnesota requires that schools have a standards based curriculum. In other words, schools must identify what students must learn and be able to do to prepare for post-secondary education (trade schools, community colleges and four year colleges and universities) and careers. The Minnesota Academic Standards sets a rigorous bar very similar to standards written in ACT's College and Career Readiness Standards.

Standards along with testing allow teachers to know where students may need additional help to reach their fullest potential. Test results allow the district to report to the community overall, how its students are achieving. Specific to STMA, are we reaching the goal of students achieving in the top 15% of schools in Minnesota?

12. *Does the Common Core require collection of information and sharing of information about my student with state and federal officials or change the rights of parents?*

No, the Common Core identifies what students need to know and be able to do. MCA III results are submitted to the state as a measure of students satisfactorily completing the standards.

### **Summary**

The Common Core standards began as a state-led initiative to identify consistent skills and knowledge students need to succeed in today's global economy. Local school districts and teachers still retain the responsibility of defining curriculum, resources, instructional strategies and lesson design. While Minnesota adopted the English Language Arts Common Core Standards, it did not adopt the Mathematics Common Core Standards, as it believed its current legislatively adopted standards were more rigorous. Minnesota also will retain its own state accountability testing.