

Common Core State Standards Initiative: Assuring that All Students Graduate From High School Ready for College and Career

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE (CCSSI):

The CCSSI is a state-led effort designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of consistent, clear K-12 academic standards in English language arts and mathematics. In 2009 the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the coordinators of the initiative, convened a group of leading experts to develop K-12 standards for math and English language arts in 2010. These standards are relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills young people need to be prepared for both college and work in a global economy.

WHY PTA BELIEVES STATES SHOULD ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The Problem: American students are graduating unprepared for college and career.

- **American students are poorly prepared for college and career.** Today, most good jobs require some type of postsecondary education or training. Yet, our education system is falling short in preparing students to succeed in higher education. It is estimated that each year, \$1.4 billion is spent on remedial education for college students who have recently completed high school, a burden often borne by parents, students, and states.¹ Additionally, ACT found that less than a quarter of high school graduates are able to pass their classes (earn a C average) in their first year of college.²
- **In 1995, the U.S. was tied for first in the proportion of young adults with a college degree, but by 2004 it had fallen to 14th.**³
- **Out of 30 industrialized countries, the U.S. ranked 25th in math and 21st in science in 2006.**⁴

The Solution: Clear and consistent standards across the country and support for schools to help students achieve their full potential.

CLEAR AND CONSISTENT STANDARDS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Standards will be consistent from state to state. CCSSI is based on the principle that arithmetic should be the same in Missouri or Michigan, and reading skills should be the same in California or Florida. Today there are different academic standards in every state, and too many states have standards that do not prepare students for college and career. Consistent standards will provide appropriate benchmarks for all students regardless of where they live and allow states to more effectively help all students succeed.

In addition, families who must move from one state to another because of job changes will particularly benefit from consistent standards across states. They will no longer face the problem of their children moving to a new school and finding that they are underprepared, because the standards of the state from which they are moving are lower than those of the state to which they are relocating.

Standards will be relevant to the real world. The Common Core State Standards will reflect the knowledge and skills that young people need to succeed in college and career. They will focus on problem solving and critical thinking skills, not solely on knowledge of particular facts that have little relationship to success later in life.

Standards will be clear. In many states, standards have been updated over the years by adding additional requirements onto existing standards. The result has been standards that are often so long and confusing that they do not function as clear guides for instruction. CCSSI will address this problem by increasing clarity among educators and parents about what students

should be able to know and do at each grade level. States agreeing to adopt the standards may add a limited amount (no more than 15% of their overall standards) above and beyond what is in the core standards.

CCSSI aims to avoid additional testing. Because there are limits on how much states can add above and beyond the common core, these standards and the assessments that will be developed for them are expected to replace existing tests, not add to them.

Clearer standards will benefit parents, teachers and students. One of the benefits of adopting clearer standards is that parents, teachers and students will have a shared understanding of what is expected in school. Studies have shown that when parents are actively engaged in their children's education, student achievement outcomes are improved.⁵

Standards will incorporate the best and highest of the current state standards. This effort will build on what many states are already doing right. States with high standards will not be required to lower their standards in order to "meet in the middle" with states that now have lower standards.

SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS TO HELP STUDENTS ACHIEVE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Higher standards combined with curriculum in our schools that emphasizes the skills needed to succeed in college and career will raise student achievement. Creating better standards is clearly just the first step in raising the level of achievement of all students. The next and more important step is creating schools that give students the support they need to realize their full potential. This will mean creating curricula that is aligned to the new standards and professional development for teachers to assure that they have the knowledge and skills to improve student achievement.

Common Core State Standards will make it easier for states to create first class education systems. Consistent standards across the states will create new efficiencies. States that previously used only multiple choice tests, because they were inexpensive to develop, will be able to share the cost of developing better assessments of students' abilities to perform in the real world. They will also be able to share the cost of developing curriculum and professional development for teachers aligned to the new standards.

Curriculum and assessment tied to clearer standards will increase student achievement. Studies have shown that when curriculum allows teachers to cover select topics in greater depth, rather than numerous topics superficially, student achievement is improved.⁶ In addition, teachers will be able to better respond to students' educational needs using assessments that are aligned to the new standards.

RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

For further information on National PTA's recommendations on CCSSI see PTA's annual Public Policy Agenda. Available online at:
http://www.pta.org/public_policy_agenda.asp

If you should have any questions about National PTA and the CCSSI, please contact:

Benjamin Peck | Senior State Advocacy Strategist
National PTA Office of Public Policy
(202) 289-6790 Ext. 204
bpeck@pta.org

Mishaela Durán, M.Ed. | Director of Government Affairs
National PTA Office of Public Policy
(202) 289-6790 Ext. 201
mduran@pta.org

(Endnotes)

1. Alliance for Excellent Education, *Paying Double: Inadequate High Schools and Community College Remediation* (Washington, D.C., 2006).
2. ACT, 2009 *ACT National and State Scores* (Iowa City, 2009), <http://www.act.org/news/data/09/index.html>.
3. National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers and Achieve Inc., *Benchmarking for Success* (Washington, D.C., 2008), <http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0812BENCHMARKING.PDF>, 4.
4. *Ibid.*, 12.
5. National PTA and Harvard Family Research Project, *Seeing is Believing: Promising Practices for How School Districts Promote Family Engagement* (Cambridge, 2009).
6. *Benchmarking for Success*, 25.