

Parents' Guide to the CPS Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

June 24, 2010 ISBE Joins the Coalition to Adopt the Common Core State Standards

The Illinois State Board of Education adopted a revised set of learning standards for K-12 education to better prepare Illinois students for success in college and careers. A state-led coalition committed to academic rigor and success in the global economy developed the new standards. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) establish clear and consistent benchmarks for essential learning and skills, replacing the current Illinois standards that were developed in 1997.

These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. The standards are benchmarked to international standards to guarantee that our students are competitive in the emerging global marketplace.

Standards do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do help teachers figure out the knowledge and skills their students should have so that teachers can build the best lessons and environments for their classrooms. Standards also help students and parents by setting clear and realistic goals for success. Of course, standards are not the only thing that is needed for our children's success, but they provide an accessible roadmap for our teachers, parents, and students.

Standards cannot single-handedly improve the quality of CPS education, but they do give educators shared goals and expectations for their students. For example, the common core state standards will enable participating states to work together to:

- Make expectations for students clear to parents, teachers, and the general public;
- Encourage the development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards;
- Develop and implement comprehensive assessment systems to measure student performance against the common core state standards that will replace ISAT; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the standards.

What will CCSS mean for students?

The standards will provide more clarity about and consistency in what is expected of student learning. Until now, every state has had its own set of academic standards, meaning public education students at the same grade level in different states have been expected to achieve at different levels. This initiative will allow states to share information effectively and help provide all students with an equal opportunity for an education that will prepare them to go to college or enter the workforce, regardless of where they live. Common standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students. Rather, they will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning. In a global economy, students must be prepared to compete with not only their American peers in the next state, but with students from around the world. These standards will help prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and careers.

Reading

The standards establish a "staircase" of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read. Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective.

Writing

The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing—a basic form of argument—extending down into the earliest grades.

Research—both short, focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and longer term in depth research—is emphasized throughout the standards but most prominently in the writing strand since a written analysis and presentation of findings is so often critical.

Speaking and Listening

The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media. An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

Language

The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases. The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.

Media and Technology

Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the twenty-first century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards.

Mathematics

The Common Core mathematics standards define in a series of progressions what students should understand and be able to do in their study of math. Teachers will need to teach more than the application of an algorithm to a problem, they will need to lead students to the ability to justify, in a way appropriate to their mathematical maturity, why a particular mathematical statement is true or where a mathematical rule comes from. *There is a big difference between a student who can repeat an answer to a math problem by following a rote process and a student who can explain why the process exists in the first place.*

Science and Social Studies

The CCSS for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects provide the foundation for improvement in literacy in social studies and science coursework - outside of the language arts classroom. This provides a path towards reversing the trend toward less challenging texts in high school, at the expense of informational and expository ones. Studies have indicated that students are particularly weak at comprehending and dissecting information from difficult texts and using it to build evidence-based arguments.

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

The K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards include information on application of the standards for English language learners and students with disabilities. The CCSS will provide a greater opportunity for states to share experiences and best practices within and across states that can lead to an improved ability to best serve young people with disabilities and English language learners.

When will these changes take place in CPS?

Chicago Public Schools is beginning to transition this school year. Full implementation is planned in the 2014-15 school year, when the state assessment will also be aligned to assess CCSS.

A group of schools have volunteered to be early-adopters and are receiving supports to test out the transition process so that all schools can fully begin the process during the 2012-13. The early-adopter schools are currently developing rigorous performance tasks and units of instruction aligned with the CCSS. They will provide exemplars of instructional best practice to enable full district adoption by 2014.

Three of the early-adopter schools are in the O'Hare Elementary Network. In addition to valuable lessons learned from those schools, all O'Hare Network schools are participating in research based professional development and nationally acclaimed presenters and resources are being made available to assist in the transition.

CPS has introduced a new assessment aligned to the standards that will be delivered to all 2nd-8th graders (with testing for 2nd grade optional in the first semester). This assessment, that will become more sophisticated over time, will be used to help identify implications for instruction and planning - not for accountability purposes.

How can I get more information?

- The CCSS web-site is: <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
- ISBE has created an online resource to support the implementation in Illinois at: http://www.isbe.net/common_core.
- The CPS resource is found at: <http://www.cps.edu/commoncore/Pages> and includes a general email address to send questions or concerns commoncore@cps.edu.
- The National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has developed a series of *Parents' Guides to Student Success* and are available for download at: <http://www.pta.org/4446.htm>.
- You may also contact your school's administrators for more information.