



Commonly Asked Questions about ...

The Common Core

Worcester County Public Schools

What are educational standards and how do they relate to a curriculum?

Educational standards define expectations about what students should know and what skills students should be able to demonstrate at any given point in their education. Standards are developed by subject (or content), such as mathematics. For example, a teacher will know exactly what standards a fourth-grade student should master after a unit on fractions.

Standards are the foundation for a curriculum. A curriculum defines the courses, content, and sequence that should be taught in order to achieve student mastery of the standards.

What are the Common Core State Standards and the Common Core State Curriculum?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) – also referred to as the “Common Core” – are a set of shared (by 45 states), high-quality, internationally-benchmarked, researched-based, and clearly-defined academic expectations and goals that specify the knowledge and skills that all students will need in preparation for college and career. According to the official website of the Common Core State Standards initiative (Corestandards.org), “The standards promote equity by 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 United States and abroad.”

More than any other standards which preceded the Common Core, these new standards are relevant to the real world, focusing on the knowledge and skills that students will need to be successful *beyond* high school graduation. For example, instead of simply learning to perform addition and subtraction as mathematical operations, a student might learn these skills while balancing a mock online checkbook, learning multiple standards and skills at the same time.

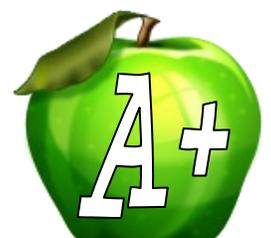
In June 2010, Maryland’s State Board of Education unanimously adopted the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for students in Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Although the Common Core is a shared set of standards between the 45 states which adopted them, each state has contributed to their own Common Core State Curriculum. During the 2010-2011 school year, Maryland created the Common Core State Curriculum Frameworks which further define what essential skills and knowledge *Maryland* students need to know and be able to do to meet the expectations of the Common Core standards. Moreover, school systems, such as Worcester County Public Schools, have additional flexibility on how to achieve student mastery on the new Common Core standards.

Who developed the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards were developed by a multi-state initiative coordinated by the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). According to Corestandards.org, “Teachers, parents, school administrators, and experts from across the country, together with state leaders, provided input into the development of the standards.”

In addition, the website states, “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.”



“Our students deserve the very best education we are able to provide, requiring us to shift our expectations from excellence to world-class so that our students may successfully compete globally. The Common Core will help us achieve this strategic direction.”

*Superintendent
Dr. Jerry Wilson*

Was the federal government involved in the development of the Common Core?

No. Although the Common Core establishes a common-set of rigorous standards for all participating states in the U.S., the Common Core standards are not a federal initiative. In fact, Corestandards.org states, “The federal government was NOT involved in the development of the standards.” Adopting the state-initiated Common Core was also a voluntary decision made by individual states. Moreover, the Common Core initiative is a non-partisan effort.

What standards did Maryland use before the Common Core?

Prior to the Common Core, Maryland – like all other U.S. states – developed its own unique set of standards. Maryland’s standards aligned with the state-mandated assessments called the Maryland School Assessments (MSA) and enabled Maryland to comply with federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

If Maryland and Worcester County Public Schools are top-performing, why did they adopt new standards?

Even though Maryland has been ranked #1 for providing high-quality public education for five consecutive years and Worcester County Public Schools is one of the highest-performing school systems in the state, the Common Core was adopted because the new standards provide:

- Alignment with expectations for college and career;
- Clarity and consistency across all participating states;
- Higher-order skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem solving;
- An emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM);
- Knowledge and skills that align with the career pathways that employers are seeking;
- Increased global-competitiveness of our students; and
- Reality-based instruction that is practical for the classroom.

Top-performing states and school systems will be challenged to achieve higher levels of performance – those that demonstrate increased college and career readiness. According to Corestandards.org, “No state in the country was asked to lower their expectations for their students in adopting the Common Core.” In addition, states and school systems have not lost their autonomy for how they teach the Common Core and how they meet the needs of each individual child.

How will these new standards benefit our students in English Language Arts and Mathematics, as well as the other content areas?

The Common Core State Standards – which require collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving – are designed to support a student’s ability to apply more demanding concepts in ways that apply to real-world issues. Students will cover fewer topics in a grade level; however, they will be exposed to content in much greater depth and the standards reflect these rigorous expectations.

Here are shifts in expectations which benefit students by:

English Language Arts (as well as other content areas)

- Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts in addition to literature.
- Reading- and writing-grounded evidence from the text.
- Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary.

Mathematics (as well as other content areas)

- Focus: Two to three topics intensely focused in each grade.
- Coherence: Concepts logically connected from one grade to the next and linked to other major topics within the grade.
- Rigor: Fluency with arithmetic, application of knowledge to real world situations, and deep understanding of mathematical concepts.

Do the standards serve our diverse population of students?

The Common Core was developed to benefit all students. For example, the standards do include information on how to apply the Common Core to students with disabilities and for English Language Learners. The Common Core is designed – with appropriate accommodations – to ensure maximum participation of students with special needs.

According to Corestandards.org, the Common Core standards do not define the intervention methods or materials needed to support students who are well-below or well-above grade-level expectations. “It is beyond the scope of the standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English Language Learners and for students with special needs.” School systems will decide how best to meet the needs of each child.

In Worcester County Public Schools, differentiated instruction – using different strategies to address different learning styles, as well as the individual needs of each student – continues to be highly effective for student learning. “The Common Core will not affect the strategies in place to help our students meet with success,” said Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Dr. John Gaddis.

What do the new standards mean for our teachers?

The Common Core standards have established what all students should know and do; however, the standards do not dictate how teachers should teach their students. According to Corestandards.org, “Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.” According to school system leadership, WCPS teachers will have the same flexibility.

In addition to shifting the focus *from* high school completion *to* college and career readiness; *from* more topics with less depth-of-knowledge *to* fewer topics with more depth-of-knowledge; and *from* demonstrating knowledge through recall *to* demonstrating knowledge through application and higher-order thinking skills, teachers will be required to increase vertical articulation – becoming familiar with what students have learned in the grade prior and what students will need to learn in the grade after their own. As important, all teachers will strengthen their understanding with what college and career readiness means in Worcester County Public Schools.

The Common Core requires a collaborative team approach, where no one works in their own silo, as an independent entity.

With ongoing, relevant professional development, the Common Core not only enhances student achievement, but it also contributes to teacher effectiveness.

“The Common Core will not limit our ability to address the individual needs of our students. Every decision has always started and ended with what is best for children, and that will never change.”

***Assistant Superintendent for Instruction
Dr. John Gaddis***



When will the Common Core be fully implemented in Maryland public schools, including WCPS?

In the state and in the school system, full implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the Common Core State Curriculum will begin in the 2013-2014 school year.

Are WCPS teachers prepared for the transition?

Yes, Worcester County Public School teachers are prepared. Teacher and administrator teams from each school are participating in Educator Effectiveness Academies (EEA) which were offered in the summers of 2011 and 2012 and will be offered in the summer of 2013. The academies are focusing on the Common Core and the Maryland Common Core State Curriculum Frameworks. In turn, EEA teams are providing professional development to all teachers in their home schools.

How will teachers, parents, and students know if students are making progress in terms of the new standards?

With new standards come a new assessment. In the 2014-2015 school year, the new assessment – called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) will be fully implemented. In fact, Maryland is one of the governing states in the PARCC consortium, leading the way in development and implementation. The assessments will be computer-based and will measure higher-order skills.

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), “The PARCC assessments will track student progress over time and will report status on a trajectory toward college- and career-readiness.”

How are the Common Core and Race to the Top reforms related?

Race to the Top (RTTT) is a competitive grant program authorized through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. RTTT funding was awarded to states which applied and were instituting reforms in four areas: 1) enhancing standards and assessments; 2) improving collection and use of data; 3) increasing teacher effectiveness; and 4) turning around struggling schools. In August 2010, Maryland was awarded \$250 million through RTTT.

To comply with the grant, Maryland established three statewide components for its Third Wave of Reform: implementation of 1) the Common Core State Curriculum; 2) PARCC Assessments; and 3) teacher and principal evaluations.

After Board of Education approval, WCPS submitted a scope of work to MSDE in November 2010 and was awarded \$1.1 million, distributed over a four-year period. The amount granted to WCPS was calculated using the state’s wealth-based formula.

The Common Core, therefore, is just one component of the state’s reform efforts.

How is WCPS paying for Common Core implementation?

The Common Core primarily affects the **decisions** made about materials of instruction and professional development already budgeted, rather than requiring the need for additional funding.

For example, textbooks associated with our Houghton Mifflin “*Invitation to Literacy*” reading program (for Kindergarten through Grade 5) were 11 years old. With a textbook budget already represented in the school system’s operating budget, instructional leaders made the **decision** to purchase textbooks aligned with the Common Core. The new program is Macmillan McGraw-Hill’s “*Treasures*.”

Similarly, professional development is already an approved budget item. When deciding what topics to teach educators, instructional leaders made the **decision** to offer professional development on the Common Core.

(The \$1.1 million received — over a four-year period — for being in compliance with Maryland’s RTTT reforms has been used to supplement expenditures associated with computers, technology, infrastructure, broadband, professional development, textbooks, materials of instruction, and longitudinal software.)

To download or print additional copies of this publication, as well as to learn about Common Core updates, please visit our website at:

www.worcesterk12.com

For more information, visit www.marylandpublicschools.org and/or www.corestandards.org