

An introduction to the Common Core:

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is the Common Core?

The Common Core is a set of broad learning goals for what students should know and be able to do in each grade level in math and English-language arts. New Jersey’s full set of standards in other subjects can be found [here](#). Some examples of standards are:

- Tell and write time to the nearest five minutes by the end of 2nd grade.
- Integrate information from several texts on the same topic, in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably, by the end of 5th grade.
- Solve real-world and mathematical problems involving volume of cylinders, cones and spheres by the end of 8th grade.¹

The standards ensure that all schools are on the same page about what students should know.

Why does the Common Core matter?

The Common Core State Standards are designed to help students develop key skills they will need to be successful after high school, in college and their careers.

By 2016, the SAT, PSAT and ACT will be aligned to the Common Core State Standards.² This means that as students move from grade to grade, they are not only mastering the material they need to be successful in K–12, but they are also building the skills necessary to be successful on important college entrance exams.

Why was the Common Core developed?

The goal of the Common Core was to address concerns that academic standards varied too much state-to-state; if students moved from one state to another—or in some cases, even from one part of a state to another—they could be learning completely different content.

Another key goal was to ensure that the standards set for students would truly prepare students for college and their careers. Across the board, even states with relatively high academic standards found that they were not adequately preparing students for success after high school.

Is the federal government imposing the Common Core on the states?

The development of the Common Core was a state-led effort, launched in 2009, that included governors and state education leaders.³ Over 40 states have signed onto the Common Core, including New Jersey.⁴

The federal government does not require states to sign onto the Common Core; states have opted in voluntarily.

¹ “Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed August 7, 2014, http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/ELA_Standards.pdf; “Common Core Standards for Mathematics,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed August 7, 2014, http://www.corestandards.org/wp-content/uploads/Math_Standards.pdf.

² “PARCC Assessment,” New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/parcc/>; “Redesigned PSAT/NMSQT,” College Board, accessed July 25, 2014, <https://www.collegeboard.org/delivering-opportunity/redesigned-psat-nmsqt>; “Redesigned SAT,” College Board, accessed July 25, 2014, <https://www.collegeboard.org/delivering-opportunity/sat/redesign>; “Common Core State Standards,” ACT, accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.act.org/solutions/college-career-readiness/common-core-state-standards/>.

³ “Development Process,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/development-process/>.

⁴ “Standards in Your State,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.

What does the Common Core have to do with testing? Is my child going to be tested more now?

New Jersey has used assessments called the NJASK (New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge) since 2004 to test student knowledge in grades 3-8. New Jersey also uses the HSPA (High School Proficiency Assessment) as a graduation requirement.⁵ These tests have historically been designed to assess how well students were meeting learning goals aligned to New Jersey's old standards in math and English-language arts.

Now that we have new math and English-language arts standards with the Common Core, we need new tests that will better assess whether students are meeting the new learning goals. New Jersey opted to replace the NJASK and HSPA with new standardized tests called the PARCC. PARCC is designed to measure whether students have met Common Core learning goals and are on track to graduating ready for college and career.

These new assessments will be given on the computer rather than on paper, and they are also designed to measure critical thinking skills rather than rote memorization. For example, students will be asked to analyze and compare engaging texts, write essays, solve math problems that they may encounter in the real world and explain how they arrived at their answers.

What do I need to know to help my child succeed with the Common Core?

There are many resources available to help parents better understand what the Common Core is and how it will impact student learning. Below you will find links to resources that can help parents navigate the standards and the new assessments.

Overview of the Common Core

- [Council of Great City Schools: Three-Minute Video Explaining the Common Core State Standards](#)
- [New Jersey Department of Education: New Jersey's Common Core Higher Standards/Brighter Future video](#)

Parent Guides

- [National PTA Parents' Guide to Student Success](#)
- [New Jersey PTA Parents' Guide to Assessments in New Jersey](#)
- [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career \(PARCC\) parent resources](#)

⁵ "Historical Context: Overview of New Jersey's Statewide Testing Program," New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed July 16, 2014, <http://www.nj.gov/education/assessment/history.shtml>.