

How will the Common Core prepare students for college?

The Common Core State Standards are a set of learning goals for math and English-language arts that are being used in more than 40 states, including New Jersey.¹ The standards raise the expectations of what students should know by the time they graduate from high school so they are ready for college. Most importantly, these learning goals are focused on developing skills that college professors have identified as critically needed, such as strong reading, writing and communication skills.²

New Jersey needs higher standards because many of our students are entering college lacking the skills they need to be successful.

- In 2010, the average remediation rate for New Jersey's state colleges and universities was 32 percent.³

Remediation rates for New Jersey's community colleges are even more concerning.

- Approximately 70 percent of first-time, full-time students were enrolled in at least one remediation course.⁴

The Common Core is designed to help strengthen foundational skills and better prepare students to address these concerns. By the end of high school, students are expected to be able to:

- Use evidence from multiple sources to support their arguments,
- Write a cohesive report that is supported by evidence,
- Critically evaluate texts to determine which arguments are valid,
- Share their findings clearly and concisely,
- Respond thoughtfully to multiple perspectives, and
- Analyze and solve real-world math problems to make decisions.⁵

¹ "Standards in Your State," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>.

² "ACT National Curriculum Survey 2009," ACT, accessed July 25, 2014, <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/NationalCurriculumSurvey2009.pdf>.

³ "Final Report of the New Jersey Department of Education College and Career Readiness Task Force, New Jersey State Department of Education, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/education/genfo/readiness.pdf>.

⁴ "The Report on the Governor's Task Force on Higher Education," New Jersey Higher Education Task Force, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/documents/GovernorsHETaskForceReport.pdf>.

⁵ "Parent's Guide to Student Success: Kindergarten-High School," National PTA, accessed August 8, 2014, <http://www.njpta.org/Parents%20Guide%20to%20Student%20Success%20NJ.pdf>.

There are several ways the Common Core State Standards will help ensure students are prepared for college:

1 Better prepare students for college entrance and placement exams

- During the 2014-2015 school year, students in New Jersey from 3rd-11th grade will take new tests in mathematics and English-language arts that are aligned to the Common Core.
- By 2016 the SAT, PSAT and ACT will also be aligned to the Common Core State Standards.⁶ 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 and placement exams.

2 Help students develop stronger critical thinking skills

- Beyond high school, students will need to analyze information from a variety of sources, including the Internet and social media. The new standards will help them develop the skills to evaluate this information, separate fact from fiction and determine which sources are valid.
- Students will also be expected to solve real-world math problems, such as determining how much soil and wood is needed to create a community garden or determining how much gas is needed for a road trip. These skills will help students be better equipped to develop solutions to problems they can expect to face during college and throughout their careers.

3 Introduce students to advanced reading material

- In college, students are expected to read nonfiction texts and quickly understand what they have read. The standards now require that students read and evaluate more nonfiction texts, gradually increasing students' exposure to nonfiction texts as they move from K-12th grade.⁷ Reading more nonfiction texts will help students better understand more complex texts, like college textbooks.

4 Develop better problem-solving skills

- The new standards emphasize the use of multiple strategies to solve the same problem. For example, teachers will show students multiple ways to get the same answer for the same math problem. Students can show their work by either adding groups of numbers together or multiplying to get to the same final answer. This gives students a menu of options for tackling questions on assessments, as well as for tackling problems in real-life situations.

5 Provide consistent standards

- The Common Core was adopted in more than 40 states across the country. The expectations for students in California are now the same for students in New Jersey. Therefore, if students move, they are less likely to miss out on the development of foundational skills. Consistent standards help level the playing field for all students, and will ensure that students are better prepared to tackle college-level coursework, no matter which state they call home.

⁶ "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/>.

⁷ "English Language Arts Standards Introduction: Key Design Consideration," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed July 26, 2014, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/introduction/key-design-consideration/>.