Common Core State Standards Initiative
Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative and why is it important?
This Common Core State Standards Initiative is a significant and historic opportunity for
states to collectively accelerate and drive education reform toward the ultimate goal of all
children graduating from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global
economy. The initiative will build off of the research and good work states have already
done to build and implement high-quality standards. The standards will be research- and
evidence-based, aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and
skills, and be internationally benchmarked.

Today we live in a world without borders. To maintain America’s competitive edge, we need
all of our students to be well prepared and ready to compete with not only their American
peers, but with students from around the world. These common standards will be a critical
first step to bring about real and meaningful transformation of our education system to
benefit all students.

States know that standards alone cannot propel the systems change we need. The common
core state standards will enable participating states to:

- Articulate to parents, teachers, and the general public expectations for students;
- Align textbooks, digital media, and curricula to the internationally benchmarked
  standards;
- Ensure professional development for educators is based on identified need and best
  practices;
- Develop and implement an assessment system to measure student performance
  against the common core state standards; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the common
  core state college and career readiness standards.

Who is leading the Common Core State Standards Initiative?
The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors
Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) have initiated a state-led process of
developing and adopting a common core of state standards.

As part of this process, they have convened a National Policy Forum composed of signatory
national organizations (e.g., the Alliance for Excellent Education, Business Roundtable,
National School Boards Association, Council of Great City Schools, Hunt Institute, National
Association of State Boards of Education, National Education Association, and others) to
share ideas, gather input, and inform the common core state standards initiative.

How will states adopt the common core state standards?
States will adopt the common core state standards through a process that respects unique
state contexts. CCSSO and the NGA Center will ask states to share their adoption timeline
and process in early 2010, when the K-12 common core state standards are completed. A
validation committee will verify that states have accurately adopted the common core state
standards.
Frequently asked Questions about the Common Core State Standards Process

What will make this process different from other efforts to create common standards? Both the timing of this initiative as well as the process give it a high probability for success. There is a growing belief among state leaders, education leaders, and business leaders that differences in state standards, in an era of increasing student mobility and global competition, no longer make sense.

This process is different since it is a state-led, vs a federal effort, and has the support of several major national organizations, including CCSSO, the NGA Center, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the National Education Association, the Hunt Institute, and the Business Roundtable, and involves participation of leading standards developers from Achieve, ACT, and the College Board.

States have been the leaders of standards-based reform efforts. The proposed adoption process respects and takes into consideration unique state contexts and encourages states to adopt the common core state standards.

Are these national standards? No. This initiative is driven by collective state action and states will voluntarily adopt the standards based on the timelines and context in their state.

By what criteria will the standards be judged? Who or what entity sets such criteria? The standards will be judged based on research and evidence that they meet the following criteria:

- Aligned with college and work expectations
- Inclusive of rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills
- Internationally benchmarked

Criteria have been set by states, through their national organizations CCSSO and the NGA Center.

Why are the common core state standards just in English-language arts and math? Are there plans to develop common standards in other areas in the future? English-language arts and math were the first subjects chosen for the common core state standards since states have the longest history of standards in these areas, they are the core of our current national accountability system, and they provide the greatest areas of leverage.

Once the English language arts and math standards are developed, states plan to develop a common core of standards in science and potentially additional subject areas. The emphasis now is on getting the English language arts and math standards right.

What grades will be covered in the common core state standards? The English-language arts and math standards will be K-12 standards. This will not cover pre-k, but the common core state standards will be informed by research from the early childhood community.
Who or what entity determines the common core state standards? CCSSO and NGA Center are responsible for the development and cross-state adoption process.

- A Standards Development Work Group, composed of standards experts is responsible for determining and writing the common core state standards. This group is composed of content experts from Achieve, ACT, and the College Board. This group will be expanded later in the year to include additional experts to develop the standards for grade K-12 in English language arts and mathematics. Additionally, CCSSO and the NGA Center have selected an independent facilitator and an independent writer as well as resource advisors to support each content area work group throughout the standards development process. The Work Group’s deliberations will be confidential throughout the process. States and national education organizations will have an opportunity to review and provide evidence-based feedback on the draft documents throughout the process.

- A Feedback Group to provide information backed by research to inform the standards development process by offering expert input on draft documents. Final decisions regarding the common core standards document will be made by the Standards Development Work Group. The Feedback Group will play an advisory role, not a decision-making role in the process.

- A Validation Committee composed of independent experts will review the process and substance of the common core state standards to ensure they are research- and evidence-based and will validate state adoption of the common standards. Members of the validation committee will be selected by governors and chiefs, and they must be national or international experts on standards and have a demonstrated record of knowledge in English-language arts, mathematics or a related field.

How will we be sure that the standards are based on evidence and not on individual beliefs about what is important?
The validation group of independent, national experts will review the process and substance of the common core state standards delineated by the standards development group to ensure they are research- and evidence-based.

What process will be employed to manage the challenges from special interest groups that will push for their content or skills to be in the common core state standards?
It is the responsibility of the validation group as well as the standards development group to ensure relevant research and evidence are considered.

Will these standards incorporate both content and skills?
Both content and skills are important and will be incorporated in the common core state standards. One of the criteria by which the standards will be determined is whether or not they are inclusive of rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills.

Will the Common Core State Standards be updated?
Yes. There will be an ongoing state-led development process that can support continuous improvement of this first version of the common core state standards based on research and evidence-based learning.
Will there be common assessments based on the common core state standards? States know that standards alone cannot propel the systems change we need. Assessments aligned with the common core state standards will play an important role in making sure the standards are embedded in our education system. NGA and CCSSO will work with those states who adopt the standards to develop a proposal to create common assessments in English language arts and mathematics.

What is the appropriate role of the federal government in this initiative? The federal government can:

- Support this effort through a range of tiered incentives, such as providing states with greater flexibility in the use of existing federal funds, supporting a revised state accountability structure, and offering financial support for states to effectively implement the standards as through the Race to the Top Fund authorized in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.
- Provide additional long-term financial support for the development of common assessments, teacher and principal professional development, other related common core state standards supports, and a research agenda that can help continually improve the common core state standards over time.
- Revise and align existing federal education laws with the lessons learned from states’ international benchmarking efforts and from federal research.

What is the timeline for the common core state standards initiative? Key dates in the project are identified below.

- September 2009 – draft of common core state standards for college and career readiness English-language arts and mathematics completed and publicly released by standards development committee.
- September 2009 – college and career readiness standards approved by validation committee
- December, 2009 – K-12 common core state standards in English-language arts and mathematics completed and publicly released.
- January 2010 – K-12 standards approved by validation committee
- Early 2010, states submit timeline and process for adoption of common core state standards in English-language arts and mathematics.