

# Common Core: Questions & Answers

*Is Common Core required by the federal government?*

States are not required to adopt the Common Core, which was created by The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. However, the federal government does have a long history of incentivizing programs it believes in, and that is the case with the Common Core. Through the Race to the Top initiative, the federal government has provided financial incentives to states that implement the Common Core.

*Were parents involved in developing Common Core?*

While the nation's governors and education commissioners led the development of the Common Core, teachers, parents, school administrators, education experts and other stakeholders provided input during the development process. The general public was also given a chance to comment on them, and the website for the Common Core State Standards received more than 10,000 comments as feedback during the effort.

*Does my district still have control over the curriculum in my child's school?*

Educational standards are not a new concept. Districts have always taken the standards that the state provides and customized them in their own curriculum. That has not changed. Furthermore, the curriculum simply guides the teaching process and outlines what students should be learning – standards and curriculum don't tell teachers how to teach.

Historically, educational standards have varied drastically from state to state. A main goal of the Common Core is to provide educational consistency for students, so that students have access to a high-quality education no matter where they live. The idea is to level the playing field and elevate the quality, so all students have the opportunity to receive an education that prepares them for success in the future.

*Does Common Core require more testing than before?*

The Common Core has meant new, different, more rigorous tests—not more tests. Experts say that good tests are needed to gauge the effectiveness of the standards.

In New York, Common Core was implemented at the same time as the new teacher and principal evaluation system, which requires districts to measure student achievement as a way to in turn measure teacher and principal effectiveness. In order to do this, most districts have instituted a series of internal student assessments, which are in addition to the Common Core tests.

*Does Common Core make learning more difficult for students with disabilities and English language learners?*

The Common Core does not require cookie-cutter instruction. Students are not expected to learn at the same pace, in the same way, or reach benchmarks at the same time. As always, teachers are able to modify instruction to meet the specific needs of their students.

Common Core is meant to result in fewer topics being covered during classroom lessons, but those topics are meant to be covered more in-depth than they have been in the past. Teachers have more time to cover subjects in greater detail

and cover subjects in ways that differentiate instruction for all types of learners. The expectation is that this should give students more time to understand and comprehend what is being taught.

*Does Common Core require the state to track unique identifying information about my child?*

The Common Core does not require the collection of any data. However, New York (like other states) has a long history of educational data collection and using data to inform everyday teaching and professional development. Districts also traditionally contract with third-party providers and/or vendors that provide various instructional and support services (e.g. transportation, food services, special education). State and federal privacy laws and regulations (like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act or FERPA) apply to all school district efforts, and New York recently adopted a “Parents’ Bill of Rights for Data Privacy and Security,” which provides additional details on the use of data.

## 10 Things to Know about Common Core

1. The Common Core is a set of shared educational goals and expectations meant to ensure that students in all schools in New York and across the country are held to rigorous standards that will prepare them for college and/or a viable career after high school – and help them compete for jobs with their peers from other countries. Studies show that the majority of future jobs will require a college diploma; however, some research indicates that four out of 10 high school graduates are not currently prepared to succeed in college or advanced-level training programs.
2. The Common Core State Standards were developed by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, with input from parents, students and educators from across the country – as well as consideration of international standards. New York began implementation of its version of the standards – the Common Core Learning Standards – in the 2012-2013 school year.
3. The Common Core is designed to be a “staircase of learning,” with content growing in complexity from grade to grade. Content learned in second grade, for example, will be more difficult than content learned in kindergarten and first grade, yet it will reinforce what was previously learned and build a solid foundation for what will be learned in third grade.
4. The standards are designed to be rigorous – and they are, according to a 2010 study of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. The study showed that out of the previous math and English language arts standards in 53 states and territories – 106 sets of standards in all – the Common Core were “superior” to 76 in rigor and content, including those of New York.
5. The Common Core is not a statewide or national curriculum. The standards outline what a student should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level in ELA and math. New science, arts and foreign language standards are also in various stages of development. A social studies framework was released in 2014.
6. In New York, the State Education Department is providing – but not mandating – curriculum modules that are aligned with Common Core. (Generally, a module can be thought of as a unit or topic of study.) New York has launched a website, <http://engageNY.org>, in an effort to help school leaders, teachers and families make the adjustment to the new standards. Districts still select the curriculum and instructional tools they will use to meet

Common Core expectations in their schools.

7. With Common Core, students are introduced to fewer topics in a given school year. Teachers will be able to go deeper into these topics than ever before, helping students gain a clearer understanding.
8. The Common Core standards in ELA mean that students will read more non-fiction – giving them the opportunity to build their knowledge, more thoroughly analyze reading materials, provide evidence to support their understanding of reading passages, and learn a wider variety of vocabulary words.
9. The Common Core standards in math focus on a deeper understanding of key concepts – versus memorizing facts – understanding how concepts relate to everyday life, and linking these concepts across grade levels and topics.
10. Parents who have questions about the standards or what their child is learning in school should contact their child’s teacher or school principal. A variety of resources about the standards are available to families, including:
  - EngageNY: <http://www.engageny.org/>
  - Achieve the Core: <http://www.achievethecore.org/>
  - Council of Great City Schools: <http://www.cgcs.org>

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