



Frequently Asked Questions

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Background and Overview of Common Core

Illinois adopted the common core standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and Math in June of 2010. Illinois continues to have educational standards for early childhood, fine arts, foreign language, physical development and health, science, social emotional, and social science. The common core for English Language Arts and Math are now incorporated into the full set of Illinois Learning Standards.

What are the Common Core Standards?

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). This has been a state-led and driven initiative from the beginning. States will voluntarily adopt the standards based on the timelines and context in their state. The standards, developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and education experts, establish clear and consistent goals for learning that will prepare our children for college and the workforce. These standards define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 education careers so that they will graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs. The Standards are (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked.

- The Common Core State Standards will provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so that teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them.
- With students, parents, and teachers all on the same page and working together for shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.
- The Common Core State Standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in both college and work.

- The best understanding of what works in education comes from practice and experience. That's why the standards are being developed by the states – not the federal government – and they incorporate the best and highest of the current state standards.
- And the best understanding of what works in the classroom comes from the teachers who are in them. That's why these standards will establish what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards.

What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is an effort to establish a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics that states can share and voluntarily adopt. These standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to go to college or enter the workforce and that parents, teachers, and students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

Why do we need educational standards?

Educational standards are a list of skills that help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning.

What about the Illinois Learning Standards currently in place for other subjects?

Illinois has in place educational standards for early childhood, fine arts, foreign language, physical development and health, science, social emotional, and social science. The Common Core for ELA and Math are now incorporated into the full set of learning standards.

Will the Illinois Learning Standards Incorporating the Common Core keep local teachers from deciding what or how to teach?

No. The standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed.

- Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met.
- Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.
- Local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will continue to make decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

How will the standards impact ELL and special education?

It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs. At the same time, all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-school lives.

The Standards should be read as allowing for the widest possible range of students to participate fully from the outset, along with appropriate accommodations to ensure maximum participation of students with special education needs. No set of grade-specific standards can fully reflect the great variety in abilities, needs, learning rates, and achievement levels of students in any given classroom. However, the Standards do provide clear signposts along the

way to the goal of college and career readiness for all students. The new standards will help teachers continue to develop and implement effective strategies for their students by providing benchmarks for skills and knowledge that their students should have by the end of the year.

What grade levels are included in the Illinois Learning Standards Incorporating the Common Core?

The English-language arts and math standards are for grades K-12.

Do the new standards provide information on instructional interventions?

The Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations.

Will the Illinois standards be completely gone or will they be used in addition to the new standards?

The common core include Math and ELA only. ELA and Math will take the place of the 1997 Illinois Learning Standards. There are no changes to the other standards at this time.

Why are the common core for just English language arts and math?

English-language arts and math were the first subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they teach skills upon which students build skill sets in other subject areas.

What is Not Covered by the Standards?

- The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach.
- While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught. A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, not to set out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught beyond what is specified herein.
- The Standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the Standards prior to the end of high school. For those students, advanced work in such areas as literature, composition, language, and journalism should be available.
- The Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations. No set of grade-specific standards can fully reflect the great variety in abilities, needs, learning rates, and achievement levels of students in any given classroom. However, the Standards do provide clear signposts along the way to the goal of college and career readiness for all students.

How is College and Career Readiness addressed in the common core standards?

The standards lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century. The descriptions that follow are not standards themselves but instead offer a portrait of students who meet the standards set out in the common core. As students advance through the grades and master the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, they are able to exhibit with increasing fullness and regularity these capacities of the literate individual.

- They demonstrate independence.
Students can, without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, students are

able independently to discern a speaker's key points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions. They build on others' ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm they have been understood. Without prompting, they demonstrate command of standard English and acquire and use a wide-ranging vocabulary.

- They build strong content knowledge.
Students establish a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance. They become proficient in new areas through research and study. They read purposefully and listen attentively to gain both general knowledge and discipline-specific expertise. They refine and share their knowledge through writing and speaking.
- They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
Students adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They set and adjust purpose for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use as warranted by the task. They appreciate nuances, such as how the composition of an audience should affect tone when speaking and how the connotations of words affect meaning. They also know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence (e.g., documentary evidence in history, experimental evidence in science).
- They comprehend as well as critique.
Students are engaged and open-minded—but discerning—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author's or speaker's assumptions and premises and assess the veracity of claims and the soundness of reasoning.
- They value evidence.
Students cite specific evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a text. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others' use of evidence.
- They use technology and digital media strategically and capably.
Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language use. They tailor their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and they integrate what they learn using technology with what they learn offline. They are familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select and use those best suited to their communication goals.
- They come to understand other perspectives and cultures.
Students appreciate that the twenty-first-century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures and who represent diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together. Students actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening, and they are able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds. They evaluate other points of view critically and constructively. Through reading great classic and contemporary works of literature representative of a variety of periods, cultures, and worldviews, students can vicariously inhabit worlds and have experiences much different than their own

What are the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards?

Each ELA strand includes college and career readiness *anchor* standards. The strands are reading, writing, speaking and language. The anchor standards further define what students

should understand and be able to do by the end of each grade level to progress towards college and career readiness in that particular area. The anchor standard has an accompanying grade-specific standard to support the broad college and career ready standards statement.

How do the common core standards affect our Response to Intervention process?

Districts and schools will need to align their curriculum and their teaching methods to the new Illinois Learning Standards. This alignment will provide the basis for “evidence-based curriculum” that is an essential element of the state’s RtI framework.

Additionally, schools and districts will need to review the standards and check the alignment of the new standards with their current universal screening tools. If the assessments provided to all students provide information on whether students are meeting benchmarks on the new Illinois Learning Standards, then the school is in good shape. If the currently used screening tools do not provide information on whether students are meeting benchmarks, then the district or school staff should review the assessment to align it to the new Illinois Learning Standards.

Where do you find information on the website about the new standards?

Visit the Common Core section of the website www.isbe.net.

English/Language Arts Standards

How are the ELA standards organized?

Each section of the standards is divided into strands:

- K-5 and 6-12 ELA have Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands; the 6-12 history/social studies, science, and technical subjects section focuses on Reading and Writing.
- Each strand is headed by a strand-specific set of College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards that is identical across all grades and content areas.
- Standards for each grade within K-8 and for grades 9-10 and 11-12 follow the CCR anchor standards in each strand. Each grade-specific standard corresponds to the same-numbered CCR anchor standard.
- Each CCR anchor standard has an accompanying grade-specific standard translating the broader CCR statement into grade-appropriate end-of-year expectations.

How are the grade levels divided in the English Language Arts?

A single **K-5** section lists standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language across the curriculum.

Grades 6-12 are covered in two content area-specific sections:

1. English Language Arts Teachers
2. Teachers of history/social studies, science and technical subjects.

Each section uses the same college and career readiness anchor standard, tuned to the literacy requirements of the particular discipline.

Why is *Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects* included for grades 6-12?

Reading and writing are critical areas across all disciplines. The literacy section is targeted to devote significant time and effort to fully develop the skills needed to utilize reading and writing within the content areas of history/social studies, science and other technical subjects.

What is included in the ELA appendices?

Three appendices accompany the main document.

- The first one contains supplementary material on reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language as well as a glossary of key terms.
- The second one consists of text exemplars illustrating the complexity, quality, and range of reading appropriate for various grade levels with accompanying sample performance tasks.
- The third one includes annotated samples demonstrating at least adequate performance in student writing at various grade levels.

Math Standards

How are the Math standards organized?

Math includes *Standards for Mathematical Practice* and *Standards for Mathematical Content*.

What are the Standards for Mathematical Practice?

The Standards for Mathematical Practice describe varieties of expertise that mathematics educators at **all levels** should seek to develop in their students. These practices rest on important “processes and proficiencies” with longstanding importance in mathematics education.

Standards for Mathematical Practice:

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

Are the Mathematical practices the same for K-12?

The mathematical practices are listed for every grade level. The only section that is different is the mathematical practices for Geometry. There are two additional practices listed specific to Geometry.

What are the Standards for Mathematical Content?

The content standards are a balanced combination of procedure and understanding. Content standards which set an expectation of understanding are potential points of intersection between the content and the mathematical practice.

Assessment linked to Common Core Standards

What is the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)?

Illinois is a governing state in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The partnership involves twenty six states with the goal of working collaboratively to develop common assessments. The Partnership’s assessment system will be *anchored in college and career readiness*. Students will take parts of the assessment at key times during the school year, closer to when they learn the material.

How soon will students be assessed using the new standards?

The 2014 ISAT will include items that are 100% aligned to the common core standards. The new PARCC assessment will be in place for the **2014-2015** school year.

Where is the most current information on assessment? Visit the Assessment section of the ISBE website, <http://www.isbe.net/assessment/parcc.htm>