

Common Core in Kansas: A Basic Primer

Common Core academic standards are back in the news this week, with the Kansas Republican State Committee adopting a [resolution](#) opposing the standards and the Kansas State Board of Education, which adopted the standards in 2010, reviewing a new set of [documents](#) to explain and defend them.

KASB is releasing the following information to help clarify the controversy around these standards in Kansas. Feel free to share this information with your community.

Background on the Common Core

How were the Common Core Standards adopted in Kansas?

Since 1992, state law has directed the Kansas State Board of Education to adopt academic standards in core subjects, provide tests in those areas to see how well students are meeting those standards, and update those standards in regular cycles.

The State Board has used committees of educators and others to develop Kansas standards, in part by basing their work on standards developed by national organizations. This means Kansas has always looked to experts and standards outside of the state as a frame of reference for what our students should know as they pass through school.

When Kansas was due to update its Reading/Language Arts and Mathematics standards in 2010 under the usual schedule and process, committees of Kansas educators and Kansas State Department of Education staff evaluated the Common Core standards, which were developed by state leaders across the country, and decided to recommend the State Board adopt them. After over a year of study, public input and hearings, the State Board did so in October, 2010, with some modifications. They are now called the Kansas College and Career Ready Standards.

How were the Common Core Standards developed?

The standards were not developed by the President, the U.S. Department of Education, or Congress. Instead, they were developed by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers to provide a "common" set of standards for student reading and math expectations across the United States, with the support of major business leaders.

In other words, the standards were developed by governors elected by the people in the 50 states; and by state school officials who are directly elected in some states, appointed by Governors in other states, or appointed by state boards of education that are elected or appointed by Governors or other state leaders. (In Kansas, the Commissioner is appointed by the elected State Board.)

Each state is free to choose whether or not to adopt the standards. At this point, 45 of the 50 states have adopted either the reading or math standards, or both. States cannot change the standards beyond a specified amount but can drop the Common Core and adopt new standards at any time.

What is the role of the federal government in the Common Core?

For the past decade under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states have been required to adopt academic standards and test students in grades 3-8 and high school for “proficiency” in reading and math to qualify for federal education aid. However, there is no requirement for consistency in either standards or the definition of proficient across the states.

With Congress unable to agree on changes to address major concerns about NCLB, the U.S. Department of Education began granting waivers from certain provisions but required states to adopt new, higher standards to be eligible. The Common Core was one way, but not the only way, to meet this requirement. Kansas adopted the Common Core before the waiver process was even announced.

The U.S. Education Department also made the Common Core one way to qualify for a state grant competition called Race to the Top and is funding the development of two state groups developing new tests based on the Common Core. However, no state is required to participate in Race to the Top or use the federally funded tests.

Why was the Common Core developed and adopted?

First, the U.S. economy is changing from most jobs requiring a high school diploma or less and relatively simple, repetitive job skills to most jobs requiring some level of education beyond high school and more advanced, complex skills. The Common Core was designed to identify the skills and knowledge students need to be successful in vocational, technical, or academic programs after school and in employment, which, by the way, aligns perfectly with the Kansas Constitution. That is why these standards are referred to as “College and Career-Ready,” with an understanding that “college” postsecondary skills are defined as technical training and/or two-year degrees as well as bachelor’s degrees and beyond.

Second, the U.S. economy must compete with other countries, many of which are meeting and surpassing American educational outcomes. The Common Core was designed to match educational expectations of our international competitors.

Third, in our mobile society, students and their families move frequently for employment, military service, and higher education. These transitions would be easier if state educational expectations were more similar. That is one reason the Common Core is strongly supported by many business and corporate leaders, the U.S. military, and higher education.

Fourth, by adopting common academic standards, it would be easier for states to compare their academic performance, and help determine what state policies are working most effectively.

Instead of requiring all 50 states to develop individual standards to meet this same set of needs, the Common Core initiative allowed states to work together.

Does this mean the Common Core is a national curriculum with a national assessment?

Standards are not curriculum. Standards identify an outcome or a destination, not the path required to get there.

In Kansas, local school boards will continue to make decisions about the textbooks and other materials students use, and teachers will continue to decide how to present the subject. There are no state (or national) requirements for using or not using particular books or content, although there are numerous lists of examples schools may consider. The choice remains with the local school board.

The State Board is expected to decide what tests to use for the new standards this fall, but Kansas is already required by NCLB to participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which some critics of public education have said is a better test than current state assessments, and most high school juniors and seniors take the national ACT or SAT test.

What is my local district doing with Common Core?

Since the standards were adopted by the Kansas State Board of Education in 2010, many districts have already taken steps to implement the standards. You can check with your child's teacher or principal to determine where they are in the implementation process.

What are some of the concerns about the Common Core?

Does the Common Core unconstitutionally expand federal power over education?

The Common Core doesn't change federal authority at all. The State Board decided on its own Constitutional authority, to adopt standards in common with other states and can change them at any time. Because adopting the Common Core was one way Kansas could qualify for the NCLB waiver, Kansas now has **more** flexibility. Getting out of the Common Core would require Kansas to start over on a new set of standards, and go back under NCLB regulations until they are adopted and approved.

Was it adopted in Kansas without adequate public input or field testing?

The Common Core was adopted through the same process as previous standards, which has never included "field testing." Local school districts are actually implementing the Common Core "on the ground" by selecting their own local curriculum, teaching practices, and materials as they see fit. In many schools, these decisions are still being made, and parents and patrons can work with their locally elected school boards to address concerns.

How will we know if the Common Core improves educational outcomes?

Like any new system, the real results of the Common Core process will not be known for several years. Kansas can expect to see lower scores on new state assessments of the Common Core, because they will be harder tests measuring more challenging materials. Setting a higher standard is an important step to improvement. However, Kansans will continue to see independent measures such as NAEP tests, graduation rates, ACT scores, and postsecondary participation. These will provide evidence of whether the Common Core is improving educational outcomes or not and allow state policy to change if needed.

Will the Common Core and related tests be too expensive?

The Kansas Legislative Post Audit Division estimated the cost of implementing the Common Core, new assessments and a new teacher evaluation system at between \$34 and \$63 million over the next five years - less than 0.2% of current total expenditures. Most of the cost is for teacher training, modifying curriculum, and new textbooks and materials. Most of these costs were already planned, such as a regular schedule for replacing textbooks. The same costs would occur if Kansas had adopted a different set of standards and will be repeated if Kansas drops the Common Core and starts over. Kansas hasn't chosen a new set of tests, so we don't even know what they will cost. The new tests are expected to be more expensive because they will be more complex, as they will evaluate students on more complex skills. However, unlike some states, Kansas is already giving its state assessments online, using computers, so there should not be additional technology costs. In fact, Legislative Post Audit said the new system may actually save money at the state level.

The real cost of the Common Core is not in adopting the standards, assessments and materials, but in actually getting more students to successfully learn the new, higher standards.

Will the Common Core force all students into a college-prep track, limiting student options?

First, the Common Core only applies to reading and math. It does not require all students to meet standards for a four-year college degree in those or other subjects. It is designed to ensure all students have the appropriate skills for **various** postsecondary career options. Right now, too many students leave high school unprepared for either college, technical training **or** a higher-skill workplace. The Common Core should actually give students more **real** choices, because they will have a stronger set of reading and math skills to use if they change their minds about career goals after high school.

Will the new tests collect and share more private, personalized data about students and families?

The Department of Education will not collect and transmit any more data from new assessments than is already required and authorized by law under the old tests.

Do the Common Core Standards require specific texts, reading materials, and novels, poetry and books?

The standards have long lists of suggested reading materials and texts, but none are required. Specific textbooks and reading materials remain a local decision in Kansas.

Examples from the Common Core:

Second Grade Math:

- **CCSS.Math.Content.2.MD.A.1** Measure the length of an object by selecting and using appropriate tools such as rulers, yardsticks, meter sticks, and measuring tapes.

Seventh Grade Math:

- **CCSS.Math.Content.7.G.B.6** Solve real-world and mathematical problems involving area, volume and surface area of two- and three-dimensional objects composed of triangles, quadrilaterals, polygons, cubes, and right prisms.

High School Math:

- **CCSS.Math.Content.HSS-CP.B.8** (+) Apply the general Multiplication Rule in a uniform probability model, $P(A \text{ and } B) = P(A)P(B|A) = P(B)P(A|B)$, and interpret the answer in terms of the model.

First Grade Reading:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.3** Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

Fifth Grade Reading:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.5.9** Compare and contrast stories in the same genre (e.g., mysteries and adventure stories) on their approaches to similar themes and topics.

High School Reading:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.9** Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.