



The Montana Common Core Standards Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How did Montana make the decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards?

A: The Montana Board of Public Education’s adoption of the Montana Common Core Standards (MCCS) was independent, voluntary and not required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) or any other federally-funded program.

As is the case with all of Montana’s content standards, before any decision was made regarding adoption, the MCCS were reviewed by educators and school administrators from across the state. Additionally, twelve public meetings about the standards were held over a two-year period.

Each state made its own decision about whether to adopt the standards. Montana took its time reviewing the standards in order to make sure they were right for Montana students. Our state was the last of 46 states to adopt the standards through a vote of the Montana Board of Public Education on November 4, 2011.

Q: How were the new standards developed?

A: States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers, and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core was developed by building on the best state standards in the United States; examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world; and carefully studying the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college, career, and life.

In English Language Arts and Literacy, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that traditional mathematics curriculum in the United States must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement; addressing the problem that curriculum is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

Q: How will the Montana Common Core Standards affect curriculum in Montana schools?

A: The MCCS are not a curriculum. They are a set of clear, shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills students need to master at each grade level. Additionally, Montana has integrated learning about the distinct and unique heritage and contributions of American Indians into its standards.

Montana's state constitution leaves curriculum development to local school districts, and locally-elected school boards set curriculum at the local level. As a result, local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will decide on the curriculum needed to meet the new standards. Teachers are free to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

In response to requests from local school districts, the OPI provides examples of curricular materials that are aligned with the new academic standards. However, the authority to select curriculum remains up to each local school district and not with the state or federal government.

Q: How do the new Montana Common Core Standards compare to the previous state standards in English Language Arts and mathematics?

A: The new standards set rigorous benchmarks at every grade level, to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, will graduate prepared for college and careers. Colleges and universities, as well as the business community, have told us that students who master these standards will be prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. This is critical as we work to reduce Montana's college remediation rates and ensure our students have the knowledge and skills required in today's workplace.

When Montana's previous standards were compared by independent evaluators to the new Montana Common Core Standards, the new standards were found to be higher, clearer, and more rigorous than our previous English and math standards. Our previous standards only provided benchmark goals for 4th grade, 8th grade, and upon graduation. These new grade by grade standards are an improved tool to measure progress not only for teachers, but for parents and students.

Q: How do the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?

The standards impact teachers by:

- Providing them with consistent goals and benchmarks to ensure students are progressing on a path for success in college, career, and life;
- Providing them with consistent expectations for students who move into their districts and classrooms from other states;
- Providing them the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across the country as they develop curricula, materials, and assessments linked to high-quality standards; and
- Helping colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers.

Q: How do the new standards address skills and content knowledge?

A: The standards recognize that both content and skills are important.

In English Language Arts and Literacy, the Montana Common Core Standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world; America’s founding documents; foundational American literature; and Shakespeare. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Montana’s Indian Education for All resources provide for inclusion of rich content that specifically supports the constitutional provision for all Montanans to learn about the unique cultural heritage of our state.

In mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student’s ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures.

The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to new situations.

Q: How do the new standards determine appropriate reading material at each grade level?

A: Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is required in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The Montana Common Core Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

The new standards require knowledge of both non-fiction and fiction, including classic myths, American literature, Shakespeare, our foundational documents, as well as literature from around the world. In addition to content coverage, the new standards require that students acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Appropriately, the crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to local schools.

Q: Do the English language arts standards include a required reading list?

A: No. The Common Core State Standards include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high-quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities. This ensures teachers have the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use, while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

Q: How will the new standards affect annual state testing in English language arts and math?

A: The adoption of new English and math standards does not affect the requirement for the state assessment. The only assessment required of schools is an annual summative test, which is required by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA was most recently reauthorized in 2001 and is generally referred to as No Child Left Behind. The annual assessment in mathematics and English language arts takes place in grades 3-8 and once in high school.

Just as our previous state assessment measured students' performance on our previous English and math standards, a new assessment is being developed to measure students' performance on the new standards. Montana has joined with more than 20 states in developing a new assessment with the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) (SBAC). The Smarter Balanced assessment is an online, computer adaptive year-end assessment where each student's test is customized based on his or her performance throughout the test.

Smarter Balanced offers significant improvements over tests of the past, including new types of questions and performance tasks that require students to apply a variety of skills to complete complex tasks that will prepare them for college and the workplace.

The new assessment will be used for state and federal accountability purposes beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

Q: Do the new standards and assessments require any additional data collection?

A: The Office of Public Instruction only collects data that is required by state and/or federal law. The adoption of the Montana Common Core Standards and the use of the Smarter Balanced assessments do not alter any of the current data collection requirements in state or federal law.