



Educating and Training Parents to Support Education Reform Frequently Asked Questions

Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI)

1) What is the CCSSI?

The CCSSI is an effort designed to improve educational outcomes for students by developing a set of common, voluntary, internationally benchmarked K-12 standards for college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics. **Common core state standards are a first step to leveling the playing field for the nation's students by increasing rigor in underperforming schools and setting equal expectations for what all students will need to know and be able to do once they graduate from high school.** These standards build on the good work conducted by states to date, and help ensure that every student has the same opportunity for a rigorous education that will prepare them for college or career.

2) Why is it important for students, teachers and parents?

Education standards and level of rigor in instruction vary from state-to-state and often, there are so many and such complicated standards that teachers find them overwhelming to teach. In addition, parents find it difficult to support their child's learning of the standards at home. Students receive a variable quality of education across the country, which is especially problematic given high mobility and the need for rigorous academics to ensure US students remain globally competitive.

CCSSI intends to develop a set of fewer, clearer and higher common standards that are evidence and research-based and internationally benchmarked.

- Fewer, clearer standards paired with rigorous curriculum and professional development aligned to the standards will **help teachers to know what to teach.**
- Common and more rigorous standards also help level the playing field by ensuring that **every student** – regardless of income or geography – **has the opportunity to engage in equally challenging work** that prepares them for college, career and citizenship.
- Fewer, clearer, higher common standards also support **making clear to parents what the expectations are for what their children should know.**
- In a growing global economy, ensuring that the standards are benchmarked internationally will **ensure that the nation's students are able to compete**, not only with their peers in neighboring states, but also around the world.

3) Who is leading the 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 voluntarily developing and adopting a common core of state standards. Other partners include the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Alliance for Excellent Education, the American Association of School Administrators, The James B. Hunt, Jr. Institute, National PTA, the Business Roundtable, Achieve, ACT and the College Board, among others. PTA is a key partner in the initiative and has supported this initiative from the start as it aligns with PTA's mission and vision to ensure equal educational opportunities for every child.



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4) What is the timeline for implementing common core standards?

Initial college and career ready standards were released for public comment earlier this fall. The K-12 common core standards in English Language Arts and mathematics will be developed by the end of January 2010. Both sets of standards will be approved simultaneously in February 2010 by members of the validation committee. In early 2010, states will submit their timelines and process for adoption of the standards. The draft college and career ready standards can be viewed online at www.corestandards.org.

A rough timeline of the initiative is as follows:

Develop	Adopt	Implement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build college-ready standards • Solicit feedback and iterate • Validate • Structure grade-by-grade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States commit to participate • States prioritize/adopt • States define implementation timeline and metrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness and support among key stakeholders • Align curriculum to standards • Align student assessments to standards • Align K-12 policies, budgets, and post secondary admissions and financial aid systems to standards • Implement accountability systems • Invest in teacher support • Develop mechanisms to support student success
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • July-December 2009: Development and feedback process • January 2010: Standards approved by validation committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early 2010: States submit timeline and process for adoption • June 30, 2010: Deadline for states to adopt standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely a phased implementation over 3-5 years

5) Why is PTA uniquely suited to support the CCSSI?

As the largest volunteer child advocacy organization with membership of over 5 million parents, families, students, and teachers, PTA is uniquely positioned to be an influential, credible, non-partisan voice in the initiative. CCSSI is well aligned with PTA’s public policy priority of equity and opportunity for all children. Parents have a critical role to play in the adoption and implementation of common standards, as they are their child’s first advocate and have the best interests of their child as a goal.

6) Is CCSSI tied into high school graduation rates?

No. The goal of the CCSSI is to develop a set of voluntary, internationally-benchmarked standards in English language arts and mathematics. The standards are a first step to meaningful reform to ensure that all students are on a level playing field. The standards are not directly tied to graduation rates, but rather form the foundation for what students need to be able to know and be able to do once the graduate from high school.



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7) If standards are raised, is it more likely that students will drop out of school?

This is a common concern heard from parents and educators alike, however data does not support that when standards are raised that the dropout rate increases. In fact, data shows the opposite: that when more is expected of students they often rise to the challenge.

8) Is CCSSI going to create a funding burden for states?

Once a critical mass of states adopts the standards, states will have the opportunity to develop collaborative tools, professional development, assessments, curriculum, and more. Through these collaborative efforts, economies of scale are likely to emerge, with possible cost savings to each state involved.

9) Is the adoption of common core standards in English language arts and mathematics going to limit student access to other subject areas, such as the arts or Career and Technical Education?

No. States are aware of the importance of other subjects to students' college and career success and do not intend for the common core standards to narrow the curriculum. Rather, because there will be fewer, clearer standards under the common core, teachers will likely be able to create deep, multi-disciplinary projects and lessons that help their students reach the standards.

10) Why are state governors supportive of this initiative?

State governors support this initiative because internationally-benchmarked, research-based standards tied to expectations of postsecondary education and workforce training programs will ensure that the states' students become effective members of the workforce. Fewer, clearer, and higher standards will set the bar for the state's long term success in the increasingly competitive global marketplace.

11) How will CCSSI be integrated with the American Diploma Project (ADP), especially for ADP states?

Achieve launched the ADP in 2001 in partnership with the Education Trust and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, with the goal of ensuring that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and career. Currently, there are 35 states in the ADP network that are working to align state standards, assessments, curriculum and accountability systems with college and work expectations. Achieve has been an integral partner in the development of the CCSSI. In Achieve's analysis of the draft common core college and career standards, Achieve found a strong degree of alignment between the CCSSI and the ADP Benchmarks. For the states who have already raised their English language arts and/or mathematics standards to a college and career-ready level will likely find that the common standards builds on that effort and major changes may not be needed to adopt the CCSSI.

- The Common Core Standards in mathematics are well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks in mathematics across all the traditional mathematical strands: Number, geometry, Algebra, data analysis and probability. While there are small differences in terms of the content, they are not significant – and both documents share the same focus on rigorous mathematical content throughout.



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- The Common Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening are also well aligned with the ADP Benchmarks in English Language Arts. While there are some topics included in the ADP benchmarks that are not addressed in the Common Core Standards, for the most part they are at a different level of detail. Both sets of standards put an emphasis on students' comprehension of complex texts, research and communications.

12) Does the CCSSI penalize students in low-performing schools by creating unrealistically high expectations?

No. The goal of CCSSI is to ensure high expectations and an excellent education for all students, regardless of where they live. Too often, students in low performing schools are held to lower expectations than their peers in higher performing districts that do not prepare them for college and work. The CCSSI will improve conditions for students in low-performing schools by preparing students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and career and compete with not only their American peers in the next state, but with students from around the world.

13) Does National PTA have a position statement or resolution that supports the CCSSI?

Yes. National PTA has adopted position statements as early as 1981 in support of voluntary, clearer, higher academic standards for all students.

14) Do the common core standards limit educators in developing culturally relevant curriculum that meets the needs of diverse students and families?

No. The core common standards do not dictate the details of curriculum; they only provide clear expectations for what each student must know and be able to do.

PTA's common core standards advocacy strategy

15) What are the objectives of the common core standards advocacy strategy PTA is developing?

PTA, with the assistance of the Bridgespan Group (www.bridgespan.org), is creating a three-year plan that positions PTA to achieve the **greatest impact in moving a common core state standards forward, while strengthening the Association's capacity to play a high-impact role in broader education reform efforts**. The CCSSI is one of PTA's advocacy initiatives, and this plan builds on and complements the Association's broader advocacy strategy.

16) What are the goals and tactics of the common core standards advocacy strategy?

PTA intends to contribute to two goals: 1) states adopt or prioritize the common standards and hold school districts in their state accountable for implementing the standards; 2) school districts implement the standards and hold the schools in their district accountable for implementing the standards.

In order to achieve these goals, PTA will use four primary tactics:

- Educate and mobilize PTA state leaders



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- Educate and mobilize PTA members
- Conduct state-level education and advocacy
- Conduct school district-level education and advocacy

17) How is PTA partnering with the Gates Foundation?

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has granted PTA \$1 million to support PTA's common core standards advocacy strategy, specifically the first year of parent education, training and awareness-building activities.

Role of State/Regional/Local PTAs

18) What role will state, council, districts and local PTAs play in the common core standards advocacy strategy?

Every part of PTA has an opportunity to play an important role in the common core standards advocacy strategy by educating parents about the CCSSI. National PTA will share information and education on the standards with all state and local PTA leaders. In addition, in several initial pilot states PTA will engage in more intensive training and mobilization, with the goal of ensuring these states and select school districts prioritize and implement the common core standards. The lessons learned from our initial pilot states will greatly inform the subsequent selection and rollout of additional states over the course of the three-year advocacy strategy.

19) Who are the pilot states and how were they identified?

In addition to educating members about CCSSI across the Association, PTA expects to work intensively in initial pilot states over the course of the three year plan. States were identified based on three criteria:

- **Strong advocacy capability**, such as the ability to mobilize members and a strong relationship between state PTA leaders and state policy makers
- **Threshold success potential** given the state's readiness to adopt standards, the likelihood that PTA's actions can differentially impact standards adoption, and the presence of key supporting partners doing work in the state that can support PTA's efforts
- For states meeting the first two criteria, the final list was chosen to create a **strong portfolio of states that maximize student impact and build PTA's learning**. For example, the first set of focus states has a mix of states that might be quicker wins and longer term wins, which allows PTA to learn in a variety of contexts.

PTA expects to select additional states in which the Association will work intensively over the course of the three year strategy.

20) Why weren't some states with strong advocacy capabilities selected as initial pilot states?

Some states in the Association with strong advocacy capability are experiencing external factors that make PTA success in the state unlikely. For example, some state capitals are undergoing severe budget crises and the ability of the state policymakers to implement common core



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standards is limited or uncertain. For this reason, some states did not meet the success potential criteria.

21) How can states become the focus of the second wave of PTA's efforts?

PTA state leaders can position their state to potentially become a future focus state by supporting the common standards and building the states advocacy capability, for example

- Conveying a commitment to make the common core standards one of the states top three advocacy priorities
- Deepening and strengthening relationships with key state education policymakers (e.g., identifying opportunities to meet and educate education policy makers such as an education commissioner or state school superintendent, or opportunities to sit on associations that include education policymakers; ideally positioning the state PTA as a go-to resource for information on select children's education issues)
- Building and demonstrating the ability to effectively mobilize significant numbers of members on education issues (e.g., by increasing the amount of member data on file, leveraging e-advocacy tools)
- Keeping abreast of the learning PTA will have in the initial pilot states

22) What will the initial pilot states be expected to do, and what support will they receive?

The initial pilot states will partner closely with National PTA to conduct three main activities over the three year plan:

- **Train local leaders and members** about the common core standards and about how to advocate successfully at the state level and school district level
- **Educate state-level education policymakers** about the common core standards and their importance to ensuring that all students are college and career ready.
- **Educate district-level education policymakers** (e.g., school district boards of education and the superintendent) about common core standards and advocate for these decision makers to make common core standards implementation a priority

The initial pilot states will ultimately help PTA achieve state and district adoption and implementation of the standards in a select number of states and school districts. In order to effectively conduct these activities, initial pilot states will receive significant support, including:

- **Education and training** of state and regional leaders from National PTA staff about the standards, how to train others and how to conduct successful state-level and district-level advocacy with respect to common core standards
- **Turnkey education and training materials and resources** tailored to allow state PTAs and other trained-trainers to educate and train local leaders, members, state and district policy makers
- **Support to develop each state's common core advocacy plan** from the Bridgespan Group (through end of 2009) and from National PTA (ongoing)
- **Research to support the advocacy plan** from National PTA including analyses of the key state-level and district-level decision-makers state PTAs wish to educate about common core standards.



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22) What will the initial pilot states be expected to do, and what support will they receive? *continued*

- **Staff resources to support the initiative** via staff members paid for by National PTA staff
- **General support and guidance from National PTA** regarding, for example, media relations, communications, implementation, and other key aspects of each state's common core standards efforts

23) How can PTA leaders and members get more information?

PTA leaders and members can speak with their State PTA President, National Service Representative or call the National PTA Office of Public Policy for information. The latest information about the CCSSI can be found online at www.corestandards.org.