

Common Core (CC)

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Introduction/History

- Bismarck Public Schools has a tradition of providing academic excellence and holding students to high standards in grades K-12.
- Colleges and the workplace are demanding different skills and more content knowledge of our students. We need to shift the focus from high school completion to college and career readiness for ALL students.
- Standards help define the knowledge and skills that will prepare students for college and for the workforce of today, regardless of the teacher or the school.
- We want to teach critical thinking, problem solving, real world application, and communication skills similar to top-notch education programs in other countries. The Common Core (CC) supports this.
- Educational standards or benchmarks have been around for more than 20 years.
- We hope you will read this information to educate yourself about the facts about the Common Core State Standards.

NOTE: In November 2014, North Dakota State University at Fargo and the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks approved stricter admission standards. Beginning in the fall of 2016, NDSU and UND will raise their minimum GPA from 2.5 to 2.75 and minimum ACT score from 21 to 22. Applying the new standards, 6% of the 2014 freshmen would have been denied admittance to NDSU or UND. Another 17% with lower scores than the minimum would have been admitted based on other qualifications such as Advanced Placement courses or extracurricular activities.

Commonly Asked Questions

What is Common Core?

Common Core State Standards spell out the English Language Arts (ELA) and math goals for students at each grade level from kindergarten through grade 12. They are clear goals for student learning and direct all teachers to develop a rigorous education, regardless of where students live. The purpose of standards is to ensure that all students who graduate from high school will be successful when they take their initial math and English courses in college (2 or 4 year) or when they enter the workforce.

Are standards the same as curriculum?

No. Standards are benchmarks for what all students should learn. Curriculum (what is taught), textbooks, and other instructional materials are decided at the local level. Teachers decide how they will use those resources to meet and exceed the standards. The Common Core does not dictate how teachers will teach. Teachers must continue to devise lesson plans and tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of students in their classroom.

Why do we need standards?

Standards are nothing new in education. They've been around for more than 20 years. In North Dakota, education standards are reviewed about every 7 years to ensure schools are teaching what students need to know to be successful in today's society and to meet the increasingly higher expectations for student achievement. Thus, state and local standards have changed over time, as they should.

Example: In the past, Bismarck Public Schools kindergarten students were to be able to recognize 40 high frequency words (is, the, you, as, of, are, etc.) according to the standard. BPS teachers have increased the number of sight words to 75 because, by mid-year, many children can already recognize 40 words. Thus the rigor of the standard was increased at the local level.

Example: In the past, our high school graduates were expected to have a lexile reading score of 1200, but college texts are written at a lexile level of 1300 or above. BPS needed to increase lexile level expectancy so students have more experience reading more complex text. The content and quality of the text are also considerations we look at to match readers to text.

Who developed the Common Core?

The Common Core is a state-led, collaborative effort to raise the bar on English and math standards. It is a product of the Council of Chief State School Officers (the top education officers in each state) and National Governor's Association, along with Achieve, a Washington-based nonprofit working to increase the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Common Core is not a federal mandate.

Why did they create the Common Core?

Common Core grew out of a concern, which continues today*, that Americans need to improve education to remain competitive in the global marketplace. The CC also provides continuity in education for students who move from state to state. These English and math standards have so far been adopted voluntarily by 45 states and the District of Columbia. North Dakota adopted CC in June of 2011 after seeking public input in September of 2010. Minnesota adopted the English standards. Alaska, Texas, Nebraska and Virginia have not adopted the CC.

****Casey Foundation concerned about student reading proficiency***

A January 2014 report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation finds 66 percent (2/3) of 4th graders in N.D. and the U.S. don't read at grade level, and that number grows to 78 percent among children from lower-income families. As reading is a key predictor of a student's future educational and economic success, the KIDS COUNT study predicts that if this trend continues, the U.S. will not have enough skilled workers for an increasingly competitive global economy by the end of the decade.

Karen Olson, ND KIDS COUNT program director, says increasing reading rates and school readiness are crucial for future economic vitality, and efforts must target the important early years of a child's life. "The first eight years of life are critical to building a foundation for learning," she says. "And this is important because, in North Dakota and in the nation, there is an increasing demand for higher levels of

education and job skills. And one way that we can ensure students are college and career-ready is to begin early."

The study uses 2013 NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) data, which is gathered at the state level and not available for comparison by individual school districts or students. Bismarck Public Schools did participate in the NAEP study. More information about the Casey report is available at www.aecf.org.

Did North Dakota have input into the standards?

More than 60 educators from across North Dakota, including 5 from Bismarck Public Schools, spent a great deal of time reviewing and comparing the ND state standards to the Common Core, and adding supplemental language. The ND educators found the Common Core standards to be equally as rigorous as the ND State Standards they replaced and, in many cases, more so. Common Core standards emphasize real learning and understanding of the material through critical thinking and applying what students have learned versus short-term memorization of answers or formulas for a test.

What if the new standards are too difficult for my child to reach?

All students deserve to be career and college ready when they graduate. Teachers are trained to use multiple methods of instruction to help all children learn. School districts provide programs, tools, and assistance to help those who struggle with a certain concept or subject.

Why is it important for educators to know the truth about the Common Core?

People ask questions of and listen to those who are in schools every day and know what is being taught. Educators know how much time and effort has gone into developing standards for our school district to ensure our students get the best education possible and can compete in this global 21st Century society. North Dakota United, which represents about 80% of the teachers in the state, supports the new Common Core standards, as do the Bismarck and Mandan Public School Districts and the Light of Christ Catholic Schools in Bismarck.

Will there be a state assessment based on these new standards?

Yes. It will replace the old North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA). The Spring NDSA will be tested in 2014 and fully implemented in 2015.

Did BPS start using Standards Based Grading because it's part of the Common Core?

No. Bismarck Public Schools started implementing Standards Based Grading in 2008 before North Dakota adopted the Common Core in 2011. Our parents of students in grades K-6 are familiar with Standards Based Grading, which uses a number system to show a student's specific level of proficiency instead of the more subjective A-F grading system. Our teachers who are using Standards Based Grading say parents feel more informed about their child's learning progress under the new system. [Here is an explanation of what the numbers mean:](#)

.05 The student demonstrates misunderstandings about the knowledge and/or skills required to meet the end of the year standard for that grade level.

1.0 The student demonstrates beginning understanding of the grade level standard.

- 2.0 The student demonstrates partial understanding of the grade level standard.
 - 3.0 The student demonstrates proficiency with the grade level standard.
 - 4.0 The student demonstrates understanding that exceeds grade level standard.
- Bismarck Public Schools plans to implement standards based grading in grades 7-8 as well.

Why are some people upset about the Common Core?

1. There is a lot of misinformation about the Common Core. Some people think it's about a specific curriculum that is being taught or books that are being read by students. That is not the case. The Common Core standards are educational benchmarks in math and English Language Arts (ELA) that should be met for students to be successful later in college or career life. The standards are not the "ceiling" of what is taught; teachers can go further with students.
2. In most states, the Common Core did not require approval by state lawmakers. Instead, it was a state agency, like the ND Department of Public Instruction, which adopted the educational standards for schools, as it has done for many years. In North Dakota, 60 educators from public and private K-12 schools and from higher education made recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
3. When people have challenged Bismarck Public Schools about the Common Core standards, we have asked them to show us which English and math standards they disagree with. Many times they have not read the standards, or they cannot point to any that are objectionable. BPS is always willing to look at any standard or curriculum resource a parent finds questionable. Parents can choose to opt out of certain curriculum for their own child, but not for all children. Bismarck Public Schools has policies and procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials (IFAA & IFAB) and for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials (KNBA).

Will other subject areas get Common Core State Standards?

Not on the national level. The effort led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governor's Association was for math and English Language Arts (ELA) only, though states and local school districts may have already developed their own standards for other subject areas. Educators nationwide are involved in efforts to develop frameworks for subjects like science, world language, health, etc.

If I don't like online assessments, can I "opt out" so my children don't have to take them?

Yes. Visit with the teacher and/or principal. If the testing company has a paper/pen version of the assessment, we will try to provide that in a timely manner.

Where can I find the Common Core State Standards so I can review them?

Here are some links to the ND Dept. of Public Instruction pages about the standards:

http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/common_core.shtm

<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/content.shtm>.

For standards used in Bismarck Public Schools, click on specific courses and grade levels on the left side of this page: <http://www.bismarckschools.org/district/curriculum/>

The National PTA also endorses standards and the Common Core, as does the U.S. Chamber:

<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/pamphlets.shtm>

<https://www.uschamber.com/blog/dispelling-common-core-misperceptions>

Here is another source of information for parents, and there are news articles at the bottom of this document: <http://www.parenttoolkit.com/>

Here's an article about math education: <http://themindfulmathematician.blogspot.com/?m=1>

How much truth is there to the film called "Building the Machine", which was produced by the Home School Legal Defense Association of Virginia, which is opposed to Common Core?

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and Fordham have put together two documents to clarify the misinformation circulated as a result of this movie, which was released March 31, 2014:

http://www.thewheelerreport.com/wheeler_docs/files/0331tfi.PDF

<http://community.ksde.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=6QI6SISHYBY%3D&tabid=4754&mid=1266>

5. The U.S. Chamber has also released its own video: <http://www.businessforcore.org/videos/>.

Common Myths & Misperceptions:

Myth: The Common Core is the **federal takeover** of education; it should be called Obamacore.

Truth: The Obama administration wasn't involved in writing the Common Core, nor is it a federal mandate, though the President does support these standards.

Myth: The Common Core "**dumbs down**" our state and local standards.

Truth: ND educators looked at the most recent state standards and the Common Core. They found the Common Core is more rigorous in many ways.

Myth: The Common Core standards **take away local control**.

Truth: Local school districts have control of what is taught and how it is taught. Common Core is not a curriculum or textbook. It's a set of English and math standards for each grade level, so that if a student moves to another state, the educational expectations are the same.

Myth: Teachers will be told **what and how to teach**.

Truth: Teachers have always had input in the development of standards (goals) and into the curriculum (what they teach) and the best method to deliver instruction (how they teach). Textbooks are also chosen by local teacher teams and approved by the school district.

Myth: Schools will no longer teach **higher level math**.

Truth: In Bismarck Public Schools, the rigor has increased in all core high school math classes, so all students are learning higher level math, not just those who choose to take additional

math courses. BPS students are required to take 3 high school math classes for graduation, Algebra 1 and above. BPS also has many higher level math courses, as well as Advanced Placement math for college credit.

Myth: Students won't read as much **literature or fiction** in school under Common Core.

Truth: By high school, 70% of what older students read in ALL subject areas should be "informational" and 30% should be "literature" to prepare students for the kind of reading they will do in college and careers. In Bismarck Public school English classes, reading is closer to 70% literature and 30% informational.

Myth: There's a list of **pornographic books** that students must read, like *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Truth: In the appendix to the English standards, there is a list of "exemplars" which are "samples" of some of the text from books that have the same level of complexity, for example, as what might be read in class at a certain grade level. These "sample texts" are a guidepost for teachers, not a required reading list. Bismarck Public Schools has not purchased *Dreaming in Cuban*. BPS has policies in place for the selection of appropriate instructional materials.

Myth: Teachers can't teach **spelling** as part of the Common Core.

Truth: There is nothing in the Common Core that tells us how to teach spelling. Some teachers may not be doing as many spelling tests because they're working with students to apply their spelling knowledge to their writing assignments.

Myth: The Common Core removes the teaching of **cursive** writing in schools.

Truth: No version of the ND state standards has ever required teaching cursive, though teachers are free to do so. Bismarck Public School teachers use print, cursive and keyboarding to teach writing and communication skills.

Myth: The Common Core **standards are too demanding**; we are expecting too much of our kids.

Truth: We should provide rigorous, relevant, and challenging content for our students. We can't teach the students of today based on our pasts as adults.

Myth: Common Core State Standards include **teacher and student testing**.

Truth: There is no testing component in the nationally-developed Common Core. However, the State of North Dakota has and does require student assessment, as well as teacher assessment to be certified to teach.

Myth: The Common Core State Standards mandate **more** student testing.

Fact: Standardized testing is not new. Congress has required assessments of student learning for decades. The new state assessment will measure real-world skills like critical thinking and problem solving, and provide real-time information during the year about how students are doing. It will **replace** existing standardized tests, and offer significant improvements over previous assessments. These include writing demonstrated at every grade level, new types of questions, and performance tasks that ask students to demonstrate an array of research, writing, and problem-solving skills to show what they know.

Myth: Common Core doesn't care if students get the **right answer**.

Truth: Students need to know how to get to the right answer and explain how they got it; they don't all have to use the same method to get the right answer.

Myth: With Common Core, students will not be allowed to **fail a class**, so teachers can't move forward with other students until they all understand the content/lesson or pass the exam.

Truth: The Common Core does not prescribe any specific grading practices. Therefore, students could still earn an F in a class. Some may be retained or held back. Some may need to repeat a course. But the entire class will not be held back because one classmate lacks proficiency in some area. Bismarck Public Schools recognizes that learners do not reach their academic goals at the same time. Teachers provide enhanced instruction for students who demonstrate proficiency and provide supports for students who have not reached grade level expectations.

Myth: The state will **lose federal funds**, like Title I and others, if Common Core is adopted.

Truth: North Dakota will not lose federal funding because of CC standards. Also, ND schools are state-funded in Century Code 15.1-06-06, and that funding is not accountable to test scores or any type of student achievement. For the past decade, federal Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has been tied to student achievement on the state assessment (NDSA), and schools can access grant dollars if they don't make AYP.

Myth: The Common Core **promotes Jihad and Islam and bans teaching the Bible**; it teaches **sex education** to kindergarten students; it's a **conspiracy** to make our children weak so we can be taken over by communists or radical Islamists.

Truth: The Common Core is standards for teaching English and math only.

Myth: The Common Core testing company will have access to my **child's personal data**.

Truth: According to the ND Dept. of Public Instruction, a recent study showed that the Smarter Balanced state assessment offers the most viable option for state tests, satisfying the need for test security, student data privacy, cost effectiveness, and involvement by ND educators in the development of the test. Also, the chief state school officers in states participating in the two common assessment consortia wrote a letter to U.S. Education Department (USED) Secretary Arne Duncan on January 23, 2014, stating, "We are writing today to confirm that the consortia will not share any personally identifiable information about K-12 students with USED or any federal agency."

Myth: There are **national experts** who do not support the Common Core standards.

Truth: You can find experts, and those who claim to be experts, on both sides of the issue:

- In 2010, the Fordham Institute determined the national Common Core standards were clearer and more rigorous than standards in English and math in 33 states. In North Dakota, ELA standards received a D grade in 2010; ND math standards had a grade of C.
- The Dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and a team of researchers concluded the Common Core standards were not a significant improvement over states' previous standards.

- Michigan State University research found Common Core math standards were very similar to those of high-achieving nations on a well-known international assessment (TIMSS), and on average, states with standards like the Common Core performed better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) used in the U.S.

Here are some news media stories about the Common Core from national and local sources:

The Associated Press ran these reports nationwide in December 2013:

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/national/critical-thinking-hallmark-of-common-core-class/article_abe8b8b4-92e2-5066-b55f-f63a6043df05.html

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/national/for-critics-of-common-core-educational-folly/article_92e67ede-00b8-52b2-9659-3dfdd8228043.html

Bismarck Tribune education reporter Hannah Johnson has done stories about Common Core:

<http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/0a40a01c-037f-11e3-80d8-0019bb2963f4.html>

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/common-core-implementation-underway/article_a70e36aa-6e43-11e3-8b0a-001a4bcf887a.html

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/opposition-group-to-common-core-starts-up/article_744d3836-6e45-11e3-a3c2-001a4bcf887a.html

The information below is from National Public Radio (NPR):

<http://www.npr.org/2014/03/18/291166780/q-a-a-crash-course-on-common-core?ft=1&f=1001>

If you have questions or concerns, please e-mail BPS Community Relations Director renae_walker@bismarckschools.org or call her at 701-323-4091.