

From: Bennett, Tony
Sent: Wednesday, April 24, 2013 10:43 AM
Subject: Overview of Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Superintendents,

It was a pleasure to speak with so many of you last week. I especially thank Governor Rick Scott for his leadership in bringing us all together.

As you well know, there has been a great deal of misinformation circulating about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Those of you on the front lines are the best source of accurate information and clarity as you communicate with families and community members.

In the coming weeks and months, we will be providing a full slate of information to share with all stakeholders. We understand the complexities of educating your students and families about the changes. Attached you'll find three documents to share with teachers, principals, families and others as you help prepare all stakeholders for full implementation of the Common Core State Standards by 2014-2015.

Specifically, this initial toolkit meets the following objectives:

1. CCSS Overview – Provide background information about the development and transformational nature of the Common Core State Standards. This document explains the standards in a clear manner and can be shared with principals, teachers and families.
2. CCSS Hot Topics – Address questions and hot topics received from public input.
3. CCSS Communications Best Practices – Provide guidance for local school districts to develop a proactive communications plan about the CCSS.

I've also included two video presentations of David Coleman speaking about the transformational nature of the Common Core State Standards. Coleman is the President of College Board and one of the architects of the standards. I believe you'll find this information engaging and informative. Here are links to both videos:

[David Coleman's Testimony to the Florida Legislature's K-12 Subcommittee](#)
(Testimony starts at 1:00:40 and ends at 1:46:00)

[David Coleman's 'Bringing the Common Core to Life'](#)

Here is a link to the Common Core State Standards Initiative:

[Common Core State Standards Initiative](#)

Thank you for all you do to improve Florida's future. We look forward to providing you with further guidance and best practices as we work together. If I can ever be of assistance in your work please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tony Bennett
Florida Commissioner of Education

Common Core State Standards – An Overview

Adoption of the Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards have been developed and voluntarily adopted by forty-five states, including the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense. The Florida State Board of Education adopted the Common Core in July of 2010. Our shared goal is to ensure Florida's students are well-prepared to compete for jobs and college admissions in today's global marketplace.

The Common Core State Standards were developed with tremendous input from educators across the country. The standards focus on critical thinking and analysis rather than rote memorization and "teaching to the test."

Relevance to Students

A major component of the Common Core State Standards focuses the learning atmosphere on its relevance to students. By providing concrete examples and expectations for student achievement, students gain a deeper understanding of the most important concepts they need to be successful in life. Just as crucial, the standards empower teachers and provide flexibility to develop more creative content in their classroom at the local level.

Common Core State Standards will allow us to innovate alongside every other state choosing to adopt the standards. This will give state leaders a much more accurate measure of how students learn relative to their national and international peers.

Standards created with tremendous public input

The Council for Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association led the initiative and public feedback was actively solicited from across Florida. Teachers, education professionals, families, businesses, lawmakers and others all have had input into creating a set of world-class standards.

More local decision-making

There are fewer standards in Florida under Common Core, but they require a higher level of mastery. This means local school and district leaders will have the authority to find the best way to individualize learning and meet their students' needs.

Assessing College and Career Readiness

Because the vast majority of states chose to adopt the Common Core State Standards, we will have the ability to compare and measure our success against other states like never before. In order to do this we must build a world class assessment system that's aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

Beginning with the 2014-15 school year, Florida will replace portions of the FCAT with a new assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards. This assessment will be tougher and require a higher level of academic mastery – it will challenge Florida's students in new ways.

Common Core State Standards – An Overview

We all believe that when a student leaves high school they should be prepared to pass any college entrance exam and find a good paying job. Florida's new assessment will more accurately measure whether students understand the concepts they need to be successful in life.

Greater flexibility for teachers

Teachers will have more flexibility to use their training and expertise to teach concepts and analytical thinking rather than an inflexible set of points to be memorized. There will be greater freedom to teach individualized material. English/language arts materials could pertain to America's founding documents, fundamental American literature and Shakespeare. Math requirements include mastery of basic skills but with an emphasis on how these skills are applied in the real-world.

Privacy of student information remains the same

Nothing related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will result in any changes to sharing private student information and data. Common Core State Standards will not erode students' privacy rights or allow the federal government to inappropriately "track" students.

Unparalleled support from all sectors of Florida

Supporters of the Common Core State Standards include the National Education Association, the Florida Education Association, the Florida Chamber of Commerce and many other education, legislative, and business groups within our state.

Common Core State Standards – Hot Topics

Development of the Standards

Development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was driven by the states, not the federal government.

- The Council for Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Governor’s Association (NGA) led the initiative to provide consistency among states for mobile students (especially military families) and for a more consistent definition on college and career readiness. It is not part of No Child Left Behind and adoption of standards by the states is in no way mandatory.
- The CCSS were developed and voluntarily adopted by forty-five states, including the District of Columbia, four territories and the Department of Defense.
- The Florida State Board of Education adopted the Common Core in July of 2010.
- By focusing on the essential knowledge and skills for success in life, the CCSS address two major issues in the U.S., the growing number of college students in need of remedial courses and the growing skills gap in our workforce.

The CCSS were developed by educators and education experts from across the nation.

- Florida educators were involved in the writing of the CCSS.
- The Florida Department of Education (FDOE) reviewed and provided feedback prior to the release of the final set of standards.
- FDOE developed a state committee to review and recommend supplemental standards to meet Florida’s specific math and ELA requirements. The committee found no benefit to include additional standards and felt the Common Core State Standards were strong.
- The CCSS were built on international benchmarks and enable our students to compete with peers on both national and international levels.

Academic standards and curriculum/instruction are not identical.

- Academic standards are the “what” – the knowledge and skills – students are required to learn at each grade level. Curriculum and instruction are the “how” – the materials and delivery methods – students are taught.
- The CCSS do not require that educators teach with specific materials or methods.
 - Some materials, including novels, have been recommended as potential instructional materials. However, required ELA materials almost exclusively pertain to America’s founding documents, foundational American literature, Shakespeare and international literature.
 - Math requirements include mastery of foundational skills – such as fractions, decimals, multiplication – but also push for more application of math concepts and procedures for real-world practices.

Common Core State Standards – Hot Topics

Student Data and Privacy

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), student information cannot be released without prior written consent from a parent or legal guardian.

- The only disclosure exceptions pertain to health and safety emergencies, school transfers, referral to state and local authorities for compliance, or release to research organizations.
- Schools are required to notify parents annually of their rights under FERPA, but notification methods are left up to local leaders.
- Nothing related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will result in any changes to sharing private student information and data.

As part of broader education reform efforts, states have adopted data systems that allow educators and parents to measure the progress of student achievement and growth from year to year.

- These data systems are not a result of CCSS, but rather a more than decade long effort to ensure students are learning a year's worth of knowledge in a year's time and that taxpayers are seeing a return on their enormous investment in education.
- The federal government has contributed funding for state data systems going back to 2006, as part of bringing accountability to schools, and states have been funding their own data systems for much longer than that.
- The CCSS will not erode students' privacy rights or allow the federal government to inappropriately "track" students, as some pundits have declared.

Common Core State Standards – Hot Topics

Student Assessments under the CCSS

Under CCSS, portions of the FCAT will be replaced by a new assessment that aligns with the CCSS.

- There are two state consortiums developing assessments aligned with the CCSS – Smarter Balance (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment for Readiness of College and Career (PARCC).
- Florida belongs to the PARCC consortia. Florida serves as the fiscal agent for and is a governing state of PARCC, which gives Florida an enormous responsibility and role in developing the assessments of CCSS.
- There is consensus that PARCC better aligns with the accountability standards and direction of Florida's education system. These assessments will be technology driven and require a greater level of thinking to be successful.
- As the assessments continue to develop, FDOE and districts are working to ensure schools have the technology to assess and instruct students under the CCSS as well as understand the changes in assessment time and structure.
- FDOE is committed to PARCC, but will determine in June 2013 which assessment will best meet Florida's needs. District and post-secondary leadership have been involved in the discussions pertaining to the CCSS assessment and EOCs.

Common Core State Standards – Communication Tools for Local Districts

In local communities, district and school leaders are the resident experts in education. You have the knowledge to answer questions and the best opportunities to provide resources and information.

Florida has a great story to tell about the promise and transformational nature of the Common Core State Standards. By providing faculty and staff with the information they need, districts will play the most important role for full implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Be Proactive

- Host “Parent Information Workshops.”
- Engage with local media through opinion pieces and letters to the editor.
- Request time on local radio and TV news outlets to educate parents and community members about the CCSS.

Stay on Message

- Identify a strong, unifying message for your district that is reinforced through factual information and research.
- Supply material including talking points to administrators, educators and staff.
- Utilize school websites, social media tools, press releases and newsletters to disseminate information pertaining to the CCSS that emphasizes your message.
- Monitor hot topics in the community and develop responses for each myth. Engage when appropriate.

Utilize Resources

- Utilize the Florida Department of Education for up-to-date information for your district.
- Develop partnerships with other pro-CCSS community advocates, including local business and nonprofit entities who will share your message.
- Work with local and state leaders to host town halls pertaining to the CCSS.
- Communicate positive information and news articles regarding the CCSS. Include them in parent newsletters, at Back to School Nights, on school websites, and other public resources.