



School District of McFarland Parent Background

10 Big Ideas about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

“Ensuring that these standards gain real traction requires that they seep into public consciousness, indeed into the culture itself. ... Parents, voters, taxpayers, and opinion leaders as well as educators must take them seriously.”¹

1. Definition: The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) define the knowledge and skills students should have within their K-12 educational careers so that they will graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing courses and in workforce training programs.
2. The creation of the CCSS was fueled by inequity of expectations across the states, international comparisons that underscore the need for higher standards in the U.S., and the demand for a clearer and tighter alignment between the expectations of college and careers and the rigors of K-12 education.
3. The standards were state-led and developed (Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor’s Association); 36 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the standards to date, representing more than 80 percent of the public school population in the United States.
4. The standards (completed in English/Language Arts and Mathematics) are fewer, clearer, and higher; aligned with the College & Career Readiness (CCR) standards; internationally benchmarked; based on research; and essential but insufficient to impact student achievement in isolation.
5. Key advances in English/Language Arts:
 - Reading: Increase in text complexity and emphasis on informational (non-fiction) text
 - Writing: Greater focus on argument and informative/explanatory writing
 - Speaking & listening: Inclusion of informal as well as formal speaking
 - Language: Emphasis on general academic as well as domain-specific vocabulary
6. Key advances in Math:
 - Focus and coherence: fewer topics/grade level, coherent progression across grades
 - Balance of conceptual understanding and procedural fluency (skills)
 - Emphasis on reasoning as well as using math to solve complex, real-world problems
7. The standards don’t define what teachers should teach, all that can/should be taught, or how to support students who are advanced or need additional support.
8. Wisconsin (along with 30 other states) is part of the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium. The new assessment will be administered on-line twice yearly and is scheduled to be rolled out in 2014-15.
9. Examples of macro-level implementation issues:
 - Creating/finding the time, money, and commitment necessary for meaningful implementation
 - Supporting change in teaching practices to focus on depth of understanding and mastery
 - Identifying and meeting assessment challenges including the role of summative and formative assessments
 - Clarifying state-level issues such as the states’ role in curriculum development
 - Considering – and then acting on – how to translate higher standards into higher student achievement
10. To find out more ...
 - Council of Chief State School Officers & the National Governor’s Association. *Common core state standards*. Washington, D.C.: Author, 2010. www.corestandards.org
 - Carmichael, S.B. et al. *The state of state standards – and the common core – in 2010*. Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2010.

¹ Finn, C. et al. *Now what? Imperatives & options for ‘Common Core’ implementation and governance*. OH: Thomas F. Fordham Institute, 2010, 9.