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## The Common Core Standards: What Teachers Need to Know and Do

by Dr. Pamela Zimmermann

**W**hat is the best place to begin if you are trying to understand the expectations of the new national curriculum standards known as the Common Core? First, [Common Core Standards Initiative](#) contains a wealth of information about the standards so it is a great place to start your investigation. Here you would find the Common Core State Initiative's Mission Statement, that reads:

"The Common Core Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy."

### To what extent has that mission and vision for a national curriculum for students in the United States been advanced to date?

Prior to the development of the Common Core, most states had their own state learning standards in the disciplines of English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science and their state assessments (and NCLB measurements) were aligned to those standards. As of this writing, 45 of the 50 states have adopted the Common Core as their new learning standards and are in the planning stages of designing new assessments of the mastery of these standards by their states' students. These states are participating in two different assessment consortia that are currently convening to determine how to assess these new Common Core learning standards. (NOTE: As of September 2012, Common Core standards have been developed for English/Language Arts and Mathematics. A draft of new Common Core science standards was published this past summer. Social Studies standards have not yet been developed).

### How were the Common Core standards developed?

The work began with the development of the College and Career Readiness standards that were adopted in 2009. The next stage of the development was to create K-12 learning progressions designed to help students reach the College and Career Readiness standards by the end of 12th grade. These were released in June 2010. Although it is difficult to generalize about the Common Core relative to the wide-ranging variability of the current state learning standards, the Common Core Standards Initiative describes the Common Core Standards as:

- fewer, clearer and higher than most of the current standards
- aligned with college and work expectations
- reflecting rigorous content and application of knowledge

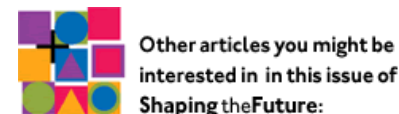


## Review, Reflect, Resolve

Several questions within the article will help you think about Common Core Standards. What advantages or disadvantages for faith- and Scripture-based teaching and learning might result from Common Core Standards?

### Links & Resources

- The [Common Core Standards](#) (2010)
- [Student Achievement Partners](#) (n.d.)
- Zimmermann, Pamela S. *Lutheran Education Association's Common Core Standards Webinar*, May 10, 2012.



[The Case for Lutheran Christian Early Childhood Education](#) by Dr. [Martin Barlau](#) (Feature)

[Passionate Believers: Life Together](#) by [Mark L'Heureux](#) (GLE)

[Evaluation: Bane or Blessing?](#) by [Neil Sandfort](#) (LEADnet)



through higher-order skills

- built upon strengths and lessons of current state standards
- internationally benchmarked so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society
- based on evidence and research.

Less is more with the Common Core, but here is a brief discussion of how the English/Language Arts and Mathematics standards are structured.

Turning first to Common Core for English/Language Arts, College and Career Readiness standards identified four key areas of focus within this discipline: **reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language**. Each of these areas has identified learning progressions from Kindergarten through Grade 12. Moreover the English/Language Arts standards also identify key skills required for reading and writing in the content areas of history, social studies, science and technology. An example of a reading goal from grade 1 (the subarea of reading literature) is asking and answering questions about key details in a text.

If one is looking for symmetry in the organization of the Common Core standards for Mathematics with the Language Arts standards, you will not find it. The Common Core Standards for Mathematics are organized around the Standards for Mathematical Practice. These are woven throughout the design of the grade-level goals.

### Math standards skills include:

- Making sense of problems and persevering in solving them.
- Reasoning abstractly and quantitatively.
- Constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others.
- Modeling with mathematics.
- Using appropriate tools strategically.
- Attending to precision.
- Looking for and making use of structure.
- Looking for and expressing regularity in repeated reasoning.



Then one will find the individual themes and grade level progression K-12 as an elaboration of these overarching categories. For example, in the subcategory of counting and cardinality, a Kindergarten goal is to know number names and the count sequence. At the high-school level, the Common Core math standards are built around conceptual themes rather than specific grade-level goals with the college and career readiness threshold as the end point for the student's study of mathematics.

There is no substitute for a careful reading and unpacking of the Common Core standards in terms of your ability to implement these new curriculum standards in your classroom. However, a general overview of what is unique to these new Literacy standards includes:

- Building student knowledge through content-rich non-fiction and informational texts.
- The grounding of reading and writing in evidence from texts.
- Practice with complex texts and the related academic vocabulary.

This is a large departure from many sets of current state Language Arts standards and their primary focus on the reading of and writing about literature. With regard to the Common Core Mathematics standards, the emphasis is fewer standards and pursuing a higher level of understanding. Thinking across grade levels is



explicit and within the major mathematical topics, the pursuit is conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency and application. It is not enough to understand a procedure. A student needs to understand where that procedure might be utilized to solve a new or unique problem.

If after diving into the English/Language Arts and Mathematics Common Core Standards, you are ready to engage with the draft of the new Science standards, take a look at the structuring framework for Science education that the new standards were built upon. A careful reading of the framework will create an understanding of the goals of the individual grade level and discipline-based standards.

## How do the Common Core standards help me?

Once you have familiarized yourself with both the structure and grade-level details of the Common Core standards, what are some possible approaches that you might utilize to begin to integrate them into your instructional program? A couple of questions are offered for your consideration:

How is the content I am teaching today addressed differently in the Common Core?

Would some of the lessons I have in place still work with the Common Core standards in place? If not, can they be revised to align with the Common Core?

Do I need to rethink how I go about teaching this discipline or specific content?

What type of professional development do I need to move forward in the implementation of the Common Core Standards? Specifically in the English/Language Arts area, one will need to examine the current level of reading material used with students to determine if it is appropriately rigorous to meet the new Common Core standards.

There are challenges ahead in implementing the Common Core standards. However, as we consider the advantages that these standards represent for our students, we can embrace the work with enthusiasm. Check the [Common Core](#) website for updates on the development of the assessments that your state will be implementing in measuring student achievement of the Common Core standards.

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## References

The [Common Core Standards](#) (2010).

[Student Achievement Partners](#) (n.d.)

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