

Common Core State Standards

An introduction for families

in the
MMSD

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of academic standards agreed to by 45 states and the District of Columbia. Created for students in kindergarten through 12th grade, CCSS was designed by educators and academic experts, and inspired by standards from the world's highest-performing countries.

CCSS represent a significant shift in the teaching of English/language arts and math and create an exciting opportunity for transforming schools and learning.

WHY NOW?

The world is changing and the American education system hasn't kept pace. In a 2012 report, the United States ranked 14th among 37 countries in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with higher education. And too many of today's high school graduates must take remedial classes to enroll in college courses.

Experts agree that we must retool education to better prepare our students to confront the challenges of an unpredictable and ever-changing future. The vision of the MMSD is to ensure every student is prepared to graduate from high school ready for college, career and community.

With today's technology, the entire world's information is at our children's fingertips. But to be successful in school and careers, our children must learn how to evaluate and use this information to solve difficult problems on their own. They must become thinkers as much as learners. CCSS equip our children with skills needed to adapt and succeed.

WHAT WERE THE STANDARDS BEFORE?

Before the adoption of CCSS in June 2010, each state developed its own set of standards, creating a wide range of uneven learning experiences and achievements. Moreover, here in Madison, schools across our district do not currently offer students the same educational content, course offerings or program options. CCSS will mean that students' educational options will be consistent and rigorous no matter where they live.

HOW ARE THESE STANDARDS DIFFERENT FROM CURRENT STATE STANDARDS?

The primary goal of CCSS is to teach critical thinking and problem solving. Students will become independent thinkers who can create informed opinions, critique the opinions of their peers and their world, defend their arguments with evidence, and communicate their points of view effectively. Students will develop a deeper understanding of key concepts, and be able to apply their knowledge to real-world situations.

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HOW WILL STUDENTS LEARN ENGLISH /LANGUAGE ARTS?

Students will read more complex texts, both nonfiction and fiction. They will learn to create written arguments using evidence from multiple texts, gather evidence to defend their opinions, and apply those skills in all subject areas in preparation for college and careers.

CCSS leave most curriculum decisions in the hands of local educators. The only reading explicitly required in the CCSS is the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, a Shakespeare play and one play by an American dramatist.

HOW WILL STUDENTS LEARN MATH?

Students will acquire the habit of mathematical thinking. The foundation, which will begin in kindergarten and continue through 12th grade, will give students the building blocks to understand why and how math works in real-world situations. While memorization of math facts is still important, more emphasis will be placed on true comprehension.

HOW WILL THIS AFFECT TEACHING?

CCSS offers teachers the opportunity to teach content more deeply, and allows them more time to help students to master critical skills. In a recent survey of math teachers in states that have adopted CCSS, more than 90% say they like the idea of the new standards.

HOW WILL MY CHILD BE TESTED ON THE CCSS?

Beginning in the 2014–15 school year, students in the MMSD will take a new standardized test called Smarter Balanced. This test focuses on developing richer, more authentic measures of student learning, and will provide teachers with relevant, precise, and actionable information to improve student performance.

AS A PARENT, WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD SUCCEED?

Read! Read with your child and encourage your child to read. Reading is the gateway to all learning. Learn more about the CCSS at mmsd.org/commoncore. Your school may offer workshops for parents to provide strategies for how to help your child benefit from this educational shift.

