



FAQ'S ABOUT THE NEW, HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

For more tools, resources, and other information about the Colorado Academic Standards, please visit: www.futureforwardcolorado.org.

Q. Why do Colorado's schools need these new standards?

A: According to a college and career readiness analysis by ACT, only 25% of Colorado students are proficient in all four core subjects, showing that our previous standards were insufficiently rigorous. With these new standards, Colorado's parents and educators will know whether students are on the right track for college and career readiness, and if not, teachers and their school support networks will have the information they need to improve, boosting students' chances for success in college and the workforce.

Q: How do the new Colorado Academic Standards compare to the old standards?

A: The new standards include ten content areas, postsecondary competencies, workforce readiness, and 21st century skills. A Thomas B. Fordham Institute study showed that the state's standards for English and Math, which include the Common Core, are superior to the old standards. Also, by incorporating the Common Core standards into the Colorado Academic Standards, our state can increase accountability and provide transparent data, allowing for true measurement from school to school, district to district, and state to state.

Q: How were these new standards created?

A: The Colorado Department of Education, along with educators, community leaders, and others, developed the Colorado Academic Standards in 2009. When the Common Core in English and Math were presented to the state shortly thereafter, the department adapted them to fit Colorado because they were more rigorous. The Colorado State Board of Education adopted all ten Colorado Academic Standards, including English and Math, in 2010.

Q: Do these standards shift control of education from the local to the federal level?

A: No. The standards are not federally mandated. Colorado, along with 45 other states, voluntarily adopted the standards. State leaders, accountable to their constituents, can withdraw their states from the standards at any time. Local school boards retain the same level of authority as prior to the adoption of the new standards, including authority around implementation.

Q: Do these changes mean that schools have to store student data?

A: No. There is no data collection requirement in the adoption of the Colorado Academic Standards, including the Common Core. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the Standards does not require data collection.

Q: Do the Colorado Academic Standards and the Common Core control the curriculum of charter schools, private schools, religious schools, Catholic schools, and homeschooling?

A: No. While the Common Core Standards are internationally benchmarked, rigorous, clear and straightforward enough to lend themselves easily to voluntary adoption by charter schools, private and faith-based schools and home schools, these entities will continue to have maximum flexibility on how and what they teach their kids. Whether schools of choice have to conform to state accountability policies remains a state, not a federal decision.

Q: Do the new standards dictate curriculum, for example, the texts and materials that teachers will use for instruction?

A: No. Common Core State Standards define what students need to know; they do not define what teachers should teach or how students should learn. The standards will actually help *preserve* freedom for curriculum choice. These decisions are left to each state and local teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards will continue to make important decisions about curriculum and how their school systems are operated.

Q: Do the new standards prevent teachers from teaching literature?

A: No. The standards do not limit reading to non-fiction, but suggest a balance between literature and non-fiction texts so students can build knowledge and broaden their perspectives. Recognizing that teachers, school districts, and states should decide on appropriate curriculum, the standards do not offer required reading lists. They establish what students need to learn, but do not tell teachers how to teach so they can tailor instruction, allowing for continued flexibility and creativity.

Q: Are these standards infusing politics in the classroom by changing the type of texts that students read?

A: No. The Common Core State Standards continue to provide a heavy focus – at least 50 percent – on the reading and comprehension of great American and English literature classics, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Students will be required to read more ‘informational’ texts, which means reading original works, but which texts are read is left up to the teacher – just as it is today. Examples of informational texts are: Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, President Ronald Reagan’s “Address to Students at Moscow State University,” and “The Declaration of Independence.” Other examples of informational texts are: Maps, charts, graphs, and info-graphics. The increased focus on information and original texts is to prepare students for college and real world reading and writing requirements. For example, 80 percent of the reading and writing done in the workplace requires individuals to read material, analyze the material using critical thinking skills and articulately write or verbally respond to the material.

Q: Do the Common Core State Standards include a controversial Science curriculum?

A: No. Contrary to purported myths about Common Core, these standards encompass only English Language Arts and Mathematics, focusing on improving needed critical thinking and analytic skills. State and local officials will continue to make important curriculum decisions when it comes to teaching History or specific issues such as Evolution and Intelligent Design, in line with what is right for their students and communities.

Q: Did the Common Core come from the federal government?

A: No. The federal government played no role in the development of the Common Core State Standards. The desire to develop higher, shared standards was expressed by states early in 2007. State education chiefs and governors led the development of the Common Core State Standards.



Q: Will the federal government take over ownership of the Common Core State Standards Initiative?

A: No. The federal government will not govern the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The initiative was and will remain a state-led effort.

Q: Did the federal government make states adopt Common Core State Standards by threatening to withhold federal education dollars?

A: No. The federal government provided incentives through the optional Race to the Top program for states to adopt bold education reforms, including higher standards, but each state, including Colorado, voluntarily made the decision to adopt Common Core and followed its own specific constitutional, legislative or administrative processes to do so. A state's decision to adopt Common Core played a very minor role in the Race to the Top competitive scoring process (making up just 8 percent of an individual state's score under the federal application).

Q: What changes are coming to the state test for students, currently named the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) and formerly known as Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP)?

A. Colorado is adopting new state standardized tests, which will be implemented across all grades during the 2014-2015 school year. The new tests, known as Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS), will replace the TCAP and assess the Colorado Academic Standards, a new set of higher expectations for what students need to know across elementary, middle, and high school. The CMAS test was developed with the Partnership for Readiness for Success in College and Career (PARCC), a consortium of 17 states.

Here are a few general examples of how the questions will look in the new test versus the old test:

Math: <http://excelined.org/common-core-toolkit/old-standards-v-common-core-a-side-by-side-comparison-of-math-expectations/>.

English: <http://excelined.org/common-core-toolkit/old-standards-v-common-core-a-side-by-side-comparison-of-english-language-arts-2/>

Q: When will the new CMAS assessment take affect?

A. The new CMAS assessments begin in the spring of 2014 with tests in Social Studies and Science. The new Math and English Language Arts assessments, based on PARCC, will be implemented with the 2014-15 school year.

Q: Why is it necessary to create a new test and change the way it is scored?

A. The state's old standards did not adequately measure students' ability to succeed from grade to grade, and as a result, students have been reaching their senior year unprepared for college and career. That data confirms students who were classified as "proficient" on the old tests (TCAP/CSAP) did poorly when they took the ACT in high school, a common measure for postsecondary and workforce readiness. This also meant these students faced remediation in college. The new, higher Colorado Academic Standards require new tests (CMAS), to ensure that our students are learning and ready to move onto the next grade or subject and, ultimately, graduation.



Q: How will students' test scores be affected?

A. Higher expectations, combined with more rigorous tests, means that student test scores will likely go down in their first year of implementation. This is a result of raising expectations, not a reflection of student or teacher performance. Instead, it means that Colorado is setting the bar higher, to ensure all students are truly on track to be prepared for college and career by the time they finish high school. The initial dip in test scores is a recalibration of the system and student test scores are expected to increase once they have more time and experience with the new standards and assessments.