

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

SUBJECT: Common Core State Standards

DATE: July 7, 2010

Executive Summary

Background of Common Core Standards Development

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a significant, historic opportunity for states to collectively develop and adopt a core set of academic standards in mathematics and English language arts. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia and two United States territories committed to participate in the Common Core initiative to address the uneven quality of state standards across the nation, a high degree of student mobility across states, the increasing pressures of global competition and a need for students to obtain the skills needed to be successful in the 21st century workplace.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were designed to meet specific criteria. Standards were designed to consist of fewer, clearer and high-level standards; to be aligned with college and work expectations; to include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher order thinking skills; to build upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards; to be internationally benchmarked so that all students will be prepared to succeed in our global economy; and to be based on evidence and research.

The standards were developed through an intensive process of national review and feedback at multiple levels. The initial college and career readiness standards were developed during the summer of 2009. After completion of these standards, a series of K-12 learning progressions occurred, including multiple rounds of feedback from states, teachers and validation committees. Multiple drafts of the CCSS were provided to states and the general public for feedback. Suggested improvements were processed by the developers and were incorporated into the final CCSS publication issued on June 2, 2010.

The English language arts standards require that students systematically develop knowledge of literature and in other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening across the content areas. The standards progress across the K-12 continuum. Students are expected to develop reading comprehension skills and to apply them to increasingly complex texts. The K-12 standards require reading in literature and discipline-specific content areas. There are specific reading recommendations, including classic myths, stories from around the world, America's founding documents and foundational American literature.

The mathematics standards are designed to focus on developing students' understanding of mathematical concepts and acquisition of fundamental reasoning habits, in addition to fluency with skills. In grades K-5, students gain a foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions

and decimals. In the middle grades, students build upon this foundation through hands-on learning in geometry, algebra, probability and statistics. The high school standards require students to apply mathematical ways of thinking to real-world issues and challenges and emphasize the use of mathematical modeling.

The CCSS do not include standards for pre-kindergarten. Many leading early childhood experts and organizations believe that the inclusion of standards prior to kindergarten are necessary and fundamental to ensure that there is a strong transition between early childhood and public education. To that end, Connecticut is making plans to include pre-kindergarten standards into the final draft of its PreK-12 standards, which will be presented to the Board this fall.

Where We Stand to Date

Connecticut is now poised to adopt and implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics as developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors Association and 48 participating states.

States competing for Race to the Top funding from the U.S. Department of Education are expected to adopt the CCSS by August 2, 2010, to receive maximum points on Assurance 1 of the application. Connecticut's Race to the Top Phase 2 application submitted on June 1, 2010, describes an inclusive adoption and implementation plan and indicates that adoption of the Common Core State Standards will be considered at the July 7, 2010, meeting of the State Board of Education. A state is considered to have adopted the standards when the standards-authorizing body within the state, in our case, the State Board of Education, has taken formal action to adopt the CCSS in its entirety, while leaving room for each state to add up to 15% of the total standards for each subject area. This supplementary work, which will continue over the summer and into the fall, will not be included in the vote to adopt on July 7, 2010.

How closely aligned are Connecticut's standards to the Common Core? An in-depth comparison of current Connecticut standards to the new Common Core Standards, summarized by the Power Point slides that accompany this memorandum, indicates a high degree of similarity between the two sets of standards. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) has generated lists of CCSS that would be new to Connecticut, as well as lists of Connecticut standards that are not mirrored in the CCSS. In the coming months, decisions must be made about whether any Connecticut standards need to be added to the CCSS, beyond those already anticipated for inclusion for 3- and 4-year old students.

State adoption of the CCSS will result in positive changes to what is currently taught, when it is taught and how it is taught. Much work lies ahead in terms of teacher preparation, curriculum writing, professional development and upgrades to instructional materials. In preparation for these impending changes, the CSDE has already begun to engage Connecticut education stakeholders in examining the new CCSS and in planning a well-supported transition to their implementation. Actions to date have included (i) providing feedback to CCSS developers on two drafts; (ii) collaborating with the Alliance of Regional Educational Service Centers (RESA Alliance) to establish a long-term plan for CCSS rollout and implementation; (iii) collaborating with Achieve to conduct a comparison study of CCSS to Connecticut standards in English language arts and mathematics; and (iv) convening a Stakeholder Engagement Conference to raise awareness of the CCSS and elicit stakeholder input on the standards' quality and recommended transition supports. As the CSDE moves into the transition and implementation phase, we will continue to work closely with higher education, business and industry, and with family, community and social advocacy organizations to assure that the Common Core Standards are actualized in a way that improves student learning.

Pre-Adoption Steps to Date

In the months leading up to the adoption recommendation to the Board, the CSDE has conducted a thorough Standards Comparison Study and a Stakeholder Engagement Conference to inform and engage the PK-20 education community, elicit their input and promote buy-in to the new standards.

- Comparison Study Description: In February 2010, the CSDE was invited to be one of several state education agencies to field test a web-based program being developed by Achieve, an independent, nonprofit education reform organization that is a partner in the Common Core Standards Initiative. A team of CSDE curriculum consultants met with representatives of Achieve on April 23, 2010, to learn to use the Common Core Comparison Tool (CCCT) and to suggest improvements for its further development. The tool analyzes matches made by state standards experts and generates reports summarizing the percentage of matches, the strength of each match and where there are grade-level differences.

On May 28, 2010, CSDE content specialists and representatives from Achieve brought together over 50 experts in Connecticut's English language arts and mathematics standards to use the tool to conduct the standards comparison study. Standards reviewers were recruited from RESCs and from school districts based on their deep knowledge of Connecticut standards and their ability to commit to two days' work. (See attached list of participants.)

Reviewers were divided into English language arts and math teams to look at standards for a grade span. They received training in the use of the online tool which displays each Common Core Standard, along with a list of all Connecticut standards and grade-level expectations (GLEs). Reviewers were asked to find matches and to rate the strength of those matches. First, pairs of reviewers worked together to identify a Connecticut standard or standards that were similar in their "essence" to each Common Core Standard. For each Common Core Standard, one of three possible judgments was made: an "Exact match," a "Collective match" or "No match." An exact match meant that the essence and the grade level were the same. A collective match meant that parts of two or more Connecticut standards, when taken together, would be similar to the Common Core Standard. "No match" meant that no Connecticut standard was judged to be essentially the same as the Common Core Standard. Second, the strength of each match was rated as either an "Excellent match," a "Good match" or a "Weak match." In short, the essence of each standard determines a match and the strength rating accounts for differences in verbiage or specificity.

- Comparison Study Results: Approximately 80 percent of the Common Core Standards match the Connecticut English language arts standards and 92 percent of the Common Core Standards match the Connecticut mathematics standards. Two hundred (200) CCSS in English language arts and 40 CCSS in mathematics are not currently included in Connecticut's current standards. Once adopted, the 240 standards will be new for Connecticut. Of the matched English language arts and mathematics standards, 68 percent were rated as "Excellent" or "Good" matches. Additional analyses of grade-level similarities and differences between CCSS and Connecticut standards were conducted. Results of these analyses will be used to inform the development of curriculum resources and teacher training.

Stakeholder Engagement Conference Description: On June 17, 2010, a CCSS Stakeholder Engagement Conference was held to share the results of the Comparison Study and to provide an opportunity for educators and other stakeholders from business and communities to provide their general impressions of the new CCSS and to recommend resources and support systems that will be needed for their effective implementation. An invitation was e-mailed to 180 stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, education organizations, higher education faculty, business leaders and community advocacy groups. Invitees were provided with a link to the CCSS and were asked to review either English language arts or

mathematics standards. The invitation included 10 prompts to guide the stakeholders' review and prepare them for group discussion at the conference. Those who attended responded to a set of individual stakeholder prompts at the conference; those who were unable to attend were provided with an opportunity to respond to the prompts electronically. Respondents indicated their level of agreement with the following statements:

INDIVIDUAL STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK PROMPTS

1)	Students meeting these core standards will be well prepared for success in college.
2)	The CCSS format is easy to follow.
3)	The CCSS are as rigorous as Connecticut standards in terms of higher order thinking skills.
4)	The CCSS represent a coherent progression of learning from grade-to-grade.
5)	The CCSS are as rigorous as Connecticut standards in terms of application of knowledge.
6)	The CCSS represent learning standards that are important for all students.
7)	Students meeting these core standards will be well prepared for post-high school success in the workplace.
8)	The CCSS embed 21st Century skills (i.e., communicating, collaborating, using technologies and solving problems creatively).
9)	The CCSS language is clear.
10)	The CCSS are developmentally appropriate for each grade.

The Stakeholder Engagement Conference was attended by 107 individuals. Of these, 64.4 percent represented school districts, 26.7 percent were from educational organizations and 8.9 percent represented higher education institutions. Of respondents representing a school district, 71.4 percent identified themselves as administrators and 28.7 percent identified themselves as teachers.

The agenda consisted of three parts: information from the CSDE regarding the importance of the Common Core Standards Initiative and its implications for Connecticut; group discussion of general impressions about the quality and rigor of the CCSS and the validity of the CCSS that will be new for Connecticut.

INDIVIDUAL STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK RESULTS:

The vast majority of respondents provided positive feedback regarding the CCSS. Respondents were most positive regarding the ability of the standards to prepare students for success in college, the ease of use of the CCSS format and the rigor of the CCSS in terms of higher order thinking skills. Over 95 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements relating to each of these topics.

GROUP CONSENSUS PROMPTS AND RESULTS:

- 1) Overall, the CCSS in [English language arts] or [Mathematics] that would be new for Connecticut are essential for college and career readiness.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS RESPONSES: 100 percent agree

MATHEMATICS RESPONSES: 100 percent agree

- 2) Overall, the CCSS in [English language arts] or [Mathematics] that would be new for Connecticut are reasonable expectations for the corresponding grade level.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS RESPONSES: 78 percent agree; 22 percent not sure

MATHEMATICS RESPONSES: 60 percent agree; 40 percent not sure

- 3) What information, resources or support systems will be needed for effective transition to, and implementation of, the CCSS?

Group responses to this question identified needs around professional development for higher education faculty, administrators and teachers, the importance of curriculum alignment at the district level and alignment with the other CSDE frameworks and existing resources. The importance of content-focused professional development was emphasized, especially for mathematics. Also requested were crosswalks between old and new standards, and a phase-in timeline. Respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration between K-12 teachers, administrators and faculty from higher educational institutions throughout the state in the implementation of CCSS.

4) What additional questions do you have concerning the adoption and transition to CCSS?

Responses called for information regarding linkages between the CCSS and the current GLEs, timeline for implementation and available funding to support the initiative. Decisions will have to be made regarding what will happen to current Connecticut pre-K standards, the current K-8 model mathematics curriculum and the GLEs not included in the CCSS. Respondents also asked for the involvement of higher education in the implementation of the standards and how to work with standards currently in the Connecticut standards but not in the CCSS.

Recommendation and Justification

Results of the Standards Comparison Study indicate that there is a close alignment between the CCSS and Connecticut’s current standards. Data collected from Connecticut education stakeholders shows strong support for the adoption of the CCSS and a belief that Connecticut students will benefit from these new standards. Most educators agree that the Common Core Standards are at least as rigorous as Connecticut’s current standards and that the CCSS will prepare all students for college and careers. Based upon this data, I recommend that the State Board of Education adopt the Common Core State Standards in their entirety. Your approval of the CCSS will enhance Connecticut’s chances of receiving a favorable score on our Race to the Top Phase 2 application, while establishing the foundation upon which we will collaborate further with LEAs and IHEs to build Connecticut’s final list of core standards.

Prepared by: _____
Elizabeth Buttner, Education Consultant
Bureau of Teaching and Learning

Reviewed by: _____
Harriet Feldlaufer, Chief
Bureau of Teaching and Learning

Approved by: _____
Dr. Marion H. Martinez, Associate Commissioner
Division of Teaching, Learning and Instructional Leadership