

8-22-2012

Common Core State Standards in Arkansas

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Citation

Rose, C. P., & Ritter, G. W. (2012). Common Core State Standards in Arkansas. *Policy Briefs*. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.uark.edu/oepbrief/49>

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Common Core State Standards in Arkansas

Summary Points

- Between 2010 and 2011, Arkansas and 44 other states adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics.
- Arkansas is implementing the CCSS over several years. In 2011-12, K-2 implemented the CCSS. In 2012-13, grades 3-8 will be implementing the CCSS, and in 2013-14, grades 9-12 will be implementing the new standards.
- The Arkansas Department of Education has developed a strategic plan to assist in teacher and curriculum development.
- Arkansas is also in the process of adopting a new computer-based assessment module, PARCC, which is scheduled to be fully implemented during the 2014-15 school year.

In July 2010, the Arkansas Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC Assessment program. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) then created a strategic plan and a timeline for the implementation of the standards. The new standards were implemented in Arkansas K-2 classrooms this past school year, 2011-12. During this current school year, 2012-13, the standards are being implemented in grades 3-8.

Background

National Standards Debate

In the early 1980s, a landmark report, *A Nation at Risk*, prompted much debate in K-12 education. It was the first of its kind to boldly state that US K-12 students were academically lagging behind their peers in other countries. Since this time, the drive to be internationally competitive has increased the dialogue surrounding the achievement of US students. As a part of this dialogue, the idea of national standards surfaced, as many of the highest achieving countries have national educational standards.

State Standards

During the Clinton administration, the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), a reauthorization of the ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), encouraged each state to establish performance and content standards and aligned assessments. States, including Arkansas, began to develop their accountability plans and state standards. During this reauthorization, the call for national standards grew more robust. Nevertheless, the opposition to national standards focused to a great extent on local control, and in the end, state control of standards won out.

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In 2002, under George W. Bush, Congress reauthorized the ESEA as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In this reauthorization, standards-based initiatives and accountability measures, through assessments, were even further emphasized. Again, however, states were in charge of implementing their own standards and assessments, and national standards were not under consideration.

During this time, as states set their own standards, assessments, and levels for proficient performance, proponents for a national standards argued that comparisons of "proficiency" were not meaningful because the "proficiency cutoffs" varied state by state. These advocates of national standards claimed that state standards could also lead to states lowering their own bar of proficiency so that students more student would pass and the state would meet the requirements of the federal laws (this is unofficially referred to as the 'Race to the Bottom'). On the other hand, opponents continued to argue that movements toward national standards represented an infringement on local control. (Read more on the debate surrounding national standards [here](#)).

Renewed Push for National Standards

In 2009, under President Barack Obama, a federally funded competitive contest, Race to the Top, spurred education reform. (Read more about Race to the Top [here](#)). In order to be competitive for the grants, states could voluntarily adopt a set of national standards.

In conjunction with Race to the Top, in 2009, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) was established. The National Governors Association Center (NGA) for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) coordinated the initiative; however, a broad spectrum of educators and other experts participated. Their goal was to create high-quality, rigorous learning standards for all grade-levels so that students would be “college and career ready.” The end result was the creation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS): K-12 English language arts (ELA) standards, and K-Algebra II mathematics standards.

What are the Common Core State Standards?

The CCSS are student learning expectations that set the bar for the knowledge and skills that must be taught. While critics argue that such national standards might be too prescriptive, advocates maintain that the standards represent learning goals that allow education freedom as to how teachers should teach students.

The **ELA Standards** are split into three sections: K-5, Grades 6-12 ELA, and Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects. Each ELA section is framed by “College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards” that shape the standards of that section. The K-5 standards are cross-disciplinary, such that history/social studies and science knowledge and skills are embedded in the ELA standards. For K-8, the ELA standards are grade specific; and for grades 9-12, the ELA standards are set in two-year bands to allow flexibility in high school course design.

The **math standards** are grade-specific for K-8, and then content-specific for high school. They do not dictate the exact order of math courses in high school, but they do prepare students for the opportunity to take Algebra I by 8th grade. The math standards are framed by the “Standards for Mathematical Practice,” which is a set of eight standards that lay out expectations for math proficiency.

The Common Core State Standards were released to the public in June 2010. Since then, 45 states, the District of Columbia, and 3 territories have fully adopted the Standards. The US Department of Education encouraged many states to adopt the Standards by August 1, 2010, as it was one of the primary focuses of the competitive federal grant, Race to the Top.

Common Core Assessments

With the new Common Core State Standards, new assessments had to be created to align to the new standards. Two major groups have developed models of tests: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for college and Careers (PARCC) and SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) (read more about these assessments [here](#)). Both models of tests will test students multiple times throughout the year on computers, which is a change for most states. States have adopted one of these assessment groups in conjunction with the CCSS.

Arkansas' Background

Previously, Arkansas public schools followed the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks. The early versions of the frameworks, called course content guides, were created in the 1980s. In the 1990s, the content guides shifted to become curricular frameworks. The State Board of Education phased in these frameworks and required that they be revised every six years. In 1999, the Arkansas Comprehensive Testing, Assessment and Accountability Program (ACTAAP) was passed by the state legislature. This act required public school students to take a standardized assessment aligned with the state standards in core academic standards in certain grades. Since then, in accordance with NCLB, grades 3-8 have been tested by the ACTAAP benchmark test in reading, math, and science (only in 5th and 7th); and students in grades 9-12 have been tested in certain content areas through End-of-Course exams.

Common Core hits Arkansas

In July 2010, the Arkansas Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC Assessment program. Due to the connection to Race to the Top funds, states had could adopt “College and Career Ready” Standards “as-is” in entirety, or adopt the standards and add up to 15 percent of their own standards. States who adopted the Common Core were more likely to receive grant money from the Race to the Top initiative. The Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) did an analysis of the Common Core Standards and decided to adopt the standards in full without adding new standards.

On the Record

It's a historic opportunity for us all to come together and collectively develop and adopt a core set of academic standards. We will ensure our students will be college and career ready and prepared to compete in the global economy."

- Arkansas Governor Mike Beebe

"As Arkansas moves forward in the implementation of the CCSS we realize and acknowledge that implementing these standards will, in the long run, require a revolution in our P-20 educational system."

- Arkansas ESEA Flexibility Request

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In the CCSS analysis, the ADE compared the CCSS to the Arkansas Curriculum Frameworks in math and ELA to assess how the new standards matched to the old ones. The ADE found that there is a 96 percent match of English language arts standards and a 95 percent match in mathematics.¹ These matches, however, are not specific to grade-level in ELA and math; many standards, especially certain math skills, have been shifted to an earlier grade level(s).¹ The ADE has reported that the alignment of CCSS to the previous Arkansas state standards is much closer at the K-8 levels than the 9-12 levels.

After the adoption, the ADE created a timeline for the implementation of the CCSS and the PARCC Assessment.

Table 1. Timeline for Implementation of the AR CCSS & PARCC

Years	CCSS Implementation	Assessments Used
2011-12	K – 2	3 – 8: Benchmark 9 – 12: EOC
2012-13	Grades 3 – 8	3 – 8: Benchmark 9 – 12: EOC
2013-14	Grades 9 – 12	3 – 8: Benchmark 9 – 12: EOC *PARCC pilot
2014-15		PARCC K – 12

*During the 2013-2014 school year, the ADE will pilot the new PARCC assessment in some districts across the state.

What's new and different for Arkansas?

According to the authors, the CCSS will better prepare students to be competitive in the 21st century, as the standards are more rigorous than many states' previous standards. As previously discussed, when the ADE matched the CCSS to the old Arkansas frameworks, there were number of shifts of standards to earlier grades in ELA and math.

In **ELA**, there is an earlier and greater emphasis on non-fiction texts. Across all grade-levels, there will be a focus on interacting with more complex texts and more emphasis on vocabulary with the aim to promote higher-order thinking. Additionally, in writing, persuasive writing is introduced at earlier grade levels so that students in grades seven and higher can become proficient in argumentative writing.

In **mathematics**, there are fewer standards across all grade-levels, and many see these standards as more rigorous than the previous Arkansas math standards. A number of math standards have shifted grade-levels in order to cluster standards so that they can be taught more in-depth and students can gain mastery of the standards.

How is Arkansas preparing for the CCSS?

In October 2011, the ADE released the Arkansas Common Core Strategic Plan. This plan outlines the preparations and timelines for implementation of the standards and the assessments.

Challenges

The ADE has recognized the major challenges in implementing the CCSS:¹

- Training teachers to teach the new standards
- Educating parents and communities in the purpose and content of the standards
- Measuring student performance and ensuring success

Phases of Implementation

In response to these challenges, the ADE highlighted four main phases of CCSS implementation:¹

1. Building awareness of the CCSS, including informing educators about the rationale for CCSS
2. Analyzing the standards to identify, understand, and implement them
3. Preparing for curriculum development and adoption, as well as utilizing and evaluating assessments
4. Evaluating the implementation and making revisions to the strategic plan when necessary

Examples of Action Plans

- In October 2011, there was an **Arkansas CCSS Summit**, where many educators met to gain understanding of the CCSS and gain the skills and knowledge necessary to implement the standards.
- A **statewide community conversation** was held in March 2012 to help community members understand the CCSS and its implementation.
- Some school **districts around the state**, such as the Benton and Fayetteville School Districts, have already hosted informational sessions to inform their community about the CCSS.

Teacher Preparation

- ADE has created a **guide for professional development planning** to assist districts in the implementation of the CCSS.
- The ADE created a **curriculum crosswalk** that linked the previous Arkansas Standards to the new Common Core standards.
- At the high school level, the ADE has created focus groups that worked on **revised courses** and the professional development for these newly revised courses. The ADE specified that these courses are not new; but they have been revised to meet the new standards. The ADE will be working to develop teachers in these courses.
- Most districts have created a **CCSS leader and team** to prepare for the CCSS transition in their district.

¹Arkansas ESEA Flexibility Request

²<http://arkansased.org/about/schools/coops.html>

For More Information about this Policy Brief and other education issues in Arkansas contact us:

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August 2012: Where is Arkansas in the Process Today?

The Common Core State Standards were implemented this past year, 2011-12, in **K-2 classrooms** across the state. Throughout this process, districts have been working to develop their teachers under the new standards. With that, districts have been faced with making many curriculum decisions. The ADE regulates that new textbooks be adopted every 6 years, and 2010-11 and 2011-12 were textbook adoption years for ELA and math. The ADE had to provide leniency in this adoption timeline due to the new standards; so many districts have opted to wait another year before adopting textbooks for ELA and math. In the process of adopting, the ADE and districts are having to evaluate which ones will best prepare their students under the new standards. Additionally, districts are making decisions as to how to best prepare students under the new standards while operating with the previous Arkansas assessments. Students will still be tested on the ACTAAP and End of Course exams through 2013-14.

Presently, districts are at different levels in their dissemination of information about the Common Core and in their teacher preparation. As stated, some districts have held parents' nights to inform parents of the changes with the CCSS. Other districts have dispersed no information about the CCSS to their communities. Larger districts have information on their websites. All the Education Service Cooperatives have information and resources on their websites. In regard to teacher preparation, some districts have required many hours for all K-12 teachers to train in the CCSS; while other districts are training their teachers as the implementations roll out. Many districts are working with their local cooperatives to train teachers and other organizations, such as The Learning Institute (TLI).

In August 2012, PARCC released the first set of item and task prototypes that provide examples for what the new assessments will look like. PARCC has also released a proposal: *PARCC College-Ready Determination Policy in English and Mathematics & Policy and General Content Claims for PARCC Performance Levels*. This proposal is out for public comment currently. For grades 3-8, it proposes five levels that will classify students based on their assessments. It also proposes five levels of performance that will be used to make college-ready determination for high school students. PARCC is still working on creating a system that will assess students' career readiness.

Conclusion

As Common Core State Standards have just been implemented in grades K-2 the past year, there are no statewide student achievement results. As the implementation continues, however, there will be results to come to assess the CCSS and the implementation of the CCSS. As districts continue with the implementation of the standards, we recognize that it is crucial to focus on teacher and curriculum development. While there are similarities in the CCSS and the previous standards, there are also many differences and many shifts of standards to earlier grades in certain areas. Therefore, it is important that teachers understand these changes and shifts, so that they can best educate students.

As the implementation continues, it is important to ask questions. *How well are teachers prepared? Is professional development aligned to the new standards in a way that truly is preparing teachers? How informed are parents and communities about the CCSS and the changes? How are students adapting to the changes? Is student achievement increasing with these new standards?* These questions will certainly lead to further questions and hopefully more effective instruction for our state's students.

Additional Resources in Arkansas

- The ADE has created a website hub with information about the CCSS for teachers and parents; this website has many resources for teachers and parents to understand the changes in CCSS: <http://www.commoncorearkansas.org/>
- This ADE website includes the CCSS Arkansas Strategic Plan: <http://ideas.aetn.org/commoncore>
- This ADE Wiki homepage specifically for districts and educators to gather resources about teaching the new standards: <http://ccssarkansas.pbworks.com>
- Many of the Education Service Cooperatives have CCSS resources and PD sessions for teachers: <http://www.arkansased.org/contact-us/education-service-cooperatives>