



# Common The Florida Standards Core

***What they mean. Why they matter.  
What's happening now.***

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**There has been considerable conversation around the Common Core State Standards that were originally adopted by Florida in 2010. The standards have been phased in through the 2013-14 school year and now some changes to them and a new student assessment to replace the FCAT are slated for 2014-15. It has been challenging for interested Floridians to keep track of what's happening with the standards and even remember why our state leaders chose to adopt them in the first place.**

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## **Let's start at the beginning.**

The genesis for the Florida Standards actually goes back to 1983 when a commission established by President Reagan published "A Nation at Risk." The report called for setting standards for what students should know and be able to do and marked the starting point for "standards-based" education reform in the U.S. In the years to follow, states began adopting standards. Since Florida began implementing standards in various subject matters in 1998, our overall graduation rate has increased 20% with steady learning gains for at-risk students. In 2001 President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act which strengthened requirements for the kinds of standards states set and required states to test students in specific grades and subjects. However, states were free to set their own standards and create their own tests.

The National Governors Association, state education commissioners and other education groups began to see the value in developing common standards and, after considerable expert input and international

benchmarking, Math and English/Language Arts standards were agreed upon in 2010. In addition to government and education leaders, groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Urban League saw value in having standards in common from state to state with families being able to know where their child stood academically when they relocated and schools having the same expectations for students regardless of zip code. American business leaders were also on board for more rigorous standards with the new reality of global competition revealing our students frequently lagging behind their peers from other countries.

Extensive national and state conversations between and among education, business, government, philanthropic and parent groups focused on what it really means for students to graduate high school "career- and college-ready." Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were determined to be a key part of the equation – agreement on education standards designed to result in students being able to meet employer expectations and/or be prepared for college-level work without needing remedial classes.

To date, the standards have been voluntarily adopted by 45 states and the U.S. Department of Defense schools although in a few states recently – including Florida – some concerns and misconceptions have surfaced that have caused them to be revisited and debated.

### Here's where Florida stands today.

Florida began implementing Common Core State Standards in the 2011-12 school year, beginning with kindergarten and first grade with a gradual phasing-in for higher grades and eventual full implementation in 2013-14. In 2014-15, the Florida Standards will be fully implemented and the state is on target to launch new student assessments aligned to the standards that will replace the FCAT tests.

Local school districts have been working diligently to train teachers in the new standards and introduce new instructional practices designed to shift from lecture-style classrooms to more interactive learning models with emphasis on developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. The majority of Florida's teachers support CCSS and, as of July 2013, 74% of Florida teachers indicated they were already teaching to the new standards in their classrooms.

Although strong bi-partisan support for the standards continues, concerns and misconceptions around the standards that generally fall within one of these three areas gained traction in 2013:

#### ***“Common Core is a federal takeover of our local schools.”***

It is important to remember that states voluntarily adopted the standards. Equally important is to know the difference between standards – what we want students to know and be able to do at each grade level – and curriculum. The standards provide the “What” we expect students to know in each grade; decisions about the “How” in terms of curriculum and instruction methods are made at the local level. Some states chose to pursue federal funding that was tied to states that adopted CCSS; however no state was mandated to adopt the standards to receive the funding. Many states chose not to pursue the federal grant and others have chosen not to adopt the standards.

#### ***“The Standards are too easy/difficult and developed without Florida educator input.”***

Different institutes and think-tanks have differing opinions about the difficulty level of the standards. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute rated Florida's previous math standards as being higher than the CCSS, but that is no longer the

case with the strengthened math benchmarks in the newly adopted Florida Standards. In terms of overall rigor and college-readiness, a 2011 ACT study reported that three-quarters of high school graduates often require remedial coursework at both the university and community college level. Finally, Florida was well represented in the development of the standards from the earliest conversations to the now adopted Florida Standards. Experts from across higher education—including the University of Florida, Harvard and UC Berkeley—as well as state departments of education (with Florida as a lead state), local educators, parents and students all developed and vetted the CCSS. In fact, Florida's Next Generation process of standards development guided the CCSS development process and was cited as a resource for writers. Florida educators were continually tapped as content experts, writers and reviewers from start to finish.

#### ***“Common Core will result in private student information being shared without parent consent.”***

The standards and aligned assessments will not change the type of student information the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) currently collects which includes name, birth date, gender, race/ethnicity and grade level. The federal government does not have access to student-level information housed in state data systems, and all information is securely stored with limited access granted only to those who assist schools and districts with data processing. To further assure student data privacy, companion bills HB 195 and SB 188 will be before the Florida Legislature this year. They propose updates to Florida's privacy laws and protect student's personal information in the digital age, from social security numbers to biometric data. They require parents to be notified each year of their rights with respect to education records and establish a transition process to using a Florida-based identification number rather than social security numbers for student identification.

Another area of angst for some was the fact that Florida had chosen PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) -- one of two national voluntary consortia of states brought together to design a rigorous student assessment aligned with the standards. These “common” assessments were designed with considerable input from educators from Florida and most other states with a goal of agreeing on tests and cut scores that would readily allow for state-to-state comparisons. Some raised concerns that federal dollars being used in developing these assessments represented “federal over-reach.”

Amid increased concerns and confusion, Governor Rick Scott directed the Florida Department of Education

to pull back from the consortia of states committed to PARCC and to hold a series of public hearings on the standards in late 2013. Parents, teachers and other interested citizens took the opportunity to give their input at the hearings with more than 19,000 comments made in person or via online submission. Florida Education Commissioner Pam Stewart contracted for a review of the comments by outside experts and ultimately recommended 99 changes to the standards.

These changes were predominately made through the addition of Calculus standards in math with cursive writing being added to the English/Language Arts standards. The State Board of Education unanimously voted to adopt these revised standards at their February 2014 meeting. (Note: The addition of Calculus standards does not mean students are required to take this level of math, they simply define the expectations for students who choose to do so.)

While the changes and additions are highly consistent with CCSS, they now include standards specific to our state. Hence, they are now known as the Florida Standards which will also encompass already adopted standards in other subject areas such as science and social studies.

### So, what do the Florida Standards actually mean for students?

Without a doubt, the standards are more rigorous and often certain benchmarks formerly expected at a certain grade level are now expected of younger students. Deeper understanding of content is a hallmark of the standards as well as mastery of foundational skills. In math, students need to move beyond knowing how to plug numbers into a formula to get the correct answer. They need to understand why the formula works and show that they understand it. In English/Language Arts, the new standards expect students to read and comprehend more challenging texts, including more original writings (versus text books) when possible. Related writing assignments ask students to make cases for their point of view based on evidence from the texts.

Stepping into a classroom where the teacher has made the instructional shifts necessary to engage students in achieving these higher standards might be different than what many think of as a “traditional” classroom experience. You are likely to see a more actively engaged classroom with students more involved in their learning and the teacher acting as more of a facilitator rather than a typical lecture-style environment.

The instructional shifts needed to help students achieve the Florida Standards cannot be underestimated. The FDOE continues to offer training and teachers are free to access lesson plan ideas on their own from resources like [www.theteachingchannel.org](http://www.theteachingchannel.org) and [www.cpalms.org](http://www.cpalms.org).

The work of local education foundations can certainly also support teachers and schools during this critical time of transition by providing additional targeted resources. With the focus on applied learning, education foundations and their supporters can make a huge difference by providing grants for innovative projects, sponsoring robotics clubs and organizing academic competitions. Education foundations can also provide the critical link for teachers to the world outside the classroom where they can make greater connections between their curriculum and how it is used in careers. Teacher immersion and externship programs as well as facilitating industry experts to work with teachers to develop interactive applied learning lesson plans can also be valuable ways to support implementation of the Florida Standards.

### And what does this all mean for testing and school grades?

The decision to not move forward with PARCC testing to replace the FCAT and a number of issues related to school grades are resulting in what promises to be a very active legislative session when it comes to the state's overall school accountability policies.

On March 17 Commissioner Stewart announced her decision to choose the non-profit American Institutes for Research (AIR) to produce the new statewide assessment to replace the FCAT. AIR was selected over four other proposals submitted. The rationale behind the choice of AIR includes the test's close alignment to the Florida Standards, the lower cost compared to the current assessment and other possible tests such as PARCC, and the ability for testing to be scheduled later in the school year. Most importantly, Commissioner Stewart cited how the new test will promote more critical and analytical thinking, better aligning to the new state standards, than the current FCAT assessment.

While parents and teachers frequently express frustration with the current emphasis on testing, research shows that most see the value in annual tests. They want better testing rather than more testing. There is also support for the goal of being able to compare the academic achievement of Florida students to students across the nation and in other countries. In a recent phone survey by the Florida Chamber, 82% of respondents ranked this as an important consideration in understanding how well our students are doing. With the assessment not yet developed and the school grading formula currently under discussion, a great deal is up in the air at the moment. Not surprisingly, there is no shortage of opinions among local school district leaders, legislators and other state leaders on how and when assessment results will factor into school grades. Interested citizens are encouraged to follow these issues throughout the coming months and can sign up for updates at [www.voiceineducation.org](http://www.voiceineducation.org).

## Who supports the Florida Standards?

While clearly there are differing opinions around their implementation and how the related assessments will be used in school accountability, there is widespread support for the Florida Standards among a diverse group of stakeholders, including:

- Florida Association of District School Superintendents
- Florida School Board Association
- Florida Education Association
- Florida Council of 100
- Florida Chamber of Commerce
- Urban League of Greater Miami
- Florida Tax Watch
- Foundation for Florida's Future/Foundation for Excellence in Education
- Florida Parent Teacher Association
- Associated Industries of Florida (AIF)
- Florida College System Council of Presidents

## How you can inform others and support the Florida Standards.

First, if you believe the Florida Standards are the right thing to do for our students, let others know and encourage them to talk with their school district leaders if they have questions about what they mean in local classrooms. You can speak up when you hear misinformation from others about the standards and

offer to get answers from reliable sources when you don't know the answer.

Consortium of Florida Education Foundations members are encouraged to host community forums in partnership with their local school district and other community partners on the Florida Standards to educate others. Education foundations might also provide presentations for area civic organizations or organize a "lunch and learn" for parents at a major employer in their community. Bringing along a teacher or school district leader to demonstrate a few standards and answer questions is encouraged. Resources and presentation materials are available through the CFEF. We also encourage you to stay informed in the coming months as decisions are made about related testing and school accountability by our state leaders. Looking ahead, understand that with these higher standards student test scores will likely drop simply because we have raised the bar higher. Florida has been steadily raising standards for many years and experience has shown our teachers and students will rise to the challenge, but we should expect there will be an adjustment period.

Success is sometimes defined as the progressive realization of a worthwhile goal. Certainly, career- and college-readiness for all Florida students is worthy of our continued focus and efforts. Adoption of the Florida Standards is a huge milestone for our state. Their successful implementation in every classroom has the potential to truly transform K-12 education in our state for generations to come.

## Sources, Resources, & Links

- *Demystifying the Movement: Answers to Common Myths about Common Core State Standards*  
[www.fldoe.org/schools/pdf/dmfaqccss.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/schools/pdf/dmfaqccss.pdf)
- *The Florida Standards in English/Language Arts*  
[www.fldoe.org/pdf/lafs.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/pdf/lafs.pdf)
- *The Florida Standards in Math*  
[www.fldoe.org/pdf/mathfs.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/pdf/mathfs.pdf)
- *Q & A on Proposed Assessments to Replace FCAT*  
[www.fldoe.org/pdf/QA-03-17.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/pdf/QA-03-17.pdf)
- [www.flchamber.com/champions-for-career-and-college-readiness/](http://www.flchamber.com/champions-for-career-and-college-readiness/)
- [www.commoncoreworks.org](http://www.commoncoreworks.org)
- [www.learnmoregofurther.org](http://www.learnmoregofurther.org)
- [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)
- [www.pta.org/advocacy](http://www.pta.org/advocacy)
- [www.stateimpact.org](http://www.stateimpact.org)
- [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)

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