



POSITION STATEMENT: COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS IN K-12 EDUCATION



PURPOSE

NASSP states its support for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Initiative and the development of common standards and formative and summative assessments that are aligned to those college and career-ready standards in grades K-12 mathematics, English language arts, social studies, science, and technical subjects.

ISSUE

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) shows wide variety among state performance standards and between state and NAEP standards. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently known as the No Child Left Behind Act, aims to educate all students to 100% proficiency by 2014, but has never clearly defined what proficiency means as a national standard. This lack of clarity has resulted in a wide range of standards that have led to varying levels of rigor, definitions of proficiency, and assessments.

The pursuit of equal educational opportunities for all children in the new global environment; the growing need to address issues in an economically, politically, environmentally, and socially interdependent world;



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and the high mobility rate of U.S. students demand that student proficiency be measured against a consistent and rigorous set of common standards and aligned assessments that will ensure all students are college and career ready.

In June 2010, the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released the final versions of the mathematics standards and the English language arts standards, which were jointly developed by states participating in the CCSS Initiative. The standards—which were reviewed by teachers, school leaders, and education experts—specify the knowledge and skills that students must possess to be college and career ready upon graduation from high school. These standards reset expectations from high school graduation to successful completion of postsecondary education and training. Compared with international standards, the English language arts standards, in particular, raise the bar for the nation's middle level and high schools by making literacy—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—a shared responsibility across all content areas. Instead of simply working math problems, students will also be expected to know how and why to apply mathematics concepts to real-world situations using higher-order thinking. It is important to note that the CCSS are not a curriculum. They act as a guide, which will allow for local autonomy in deciding both the curriculum and the teaching strategies that states and districts will use to meet the standards.

As of December 2011, 45 states and the District of Columbia had adopted the CCSS and were working toward implementation. Other states have committed to raising their standards so all students are college and career ready when the graduate from high school in order to comply with the requirements for an ESEA flexibility waiver. ESEA reauthorization proposals being considered by Congress in 2013 would also require states to develop new science standards. In addition, two consortia of states as well as ACT, Pearson, and other private vendors are developing new assessments in mathematics and English language arts that are aligned to those standards. It is anticipated that schools will begin using these computer-based assessments as early as 2014, which will require states to invest heavily in instructional materials aligned to the assessments and in ensuring that they have adequate technology and infrastructure.



NASSP GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Next generation assessments will: provide a better assessment of what a student knows and is able to do; measure what students actually need to be college and career ready; set a common benchmark across schools, districts and states; demonstrate current achievement as well as growth; report on multiple measures of student performance; be tailored to the student's ability, provide schools with more data to inform instruction, and reduce the security issues that paper tests present.
- Each student should acquire a body of essential knowledge and skills that enable them to be college and career ready.
- Common standards and high-quality assessments are needed to measure the acquisition of the requisite learning in a rigorous, authentic, and coherent fashion.

The CCSS will benefit schools, teachers and students by ensuring equity, results, efficiency, cost effectiveness, consistency, collaboration, and innovation.



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- States, which have the constitutional responsibility for education and are the highest contributing entities to education spending, should play the primary role in the development of common standards and assessments. States and local education authorities must have the flexibility to design curricula and instruction that are geared toward achieving the common standards.



RECOMMENDATIONS

NASSP calls on Congress to:

- Abandon the punitive provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act and provide significant financial resources for states to implement the CCSS and the related assessments with fidelity.
- Delay the use of Common Core assessment results for high-stakes accountability purposes to allow for a transition period of at least two years of experience with the assessments. Specifically, we call for a delay in invoking penalties and sanctions related to test scores on schools, principals, and teachers.
- Continue to fund ongoing, coherent professional development about the developed CCSS to build the capacity of school leaders and teachers.
- Enhance the capacity of state education agencies to develop resources for middle level and high schools with high student-mobility rates and significant proportions of low-income students, English language learners, students with disabilities, and low-achieving students to help all students meet high expectations.
- Enact a comprehensive federal literacy program from birth to grade 12 to ensure that literacy is incorporated across the curriculum and that struggling students receive targeted interventions in reading and writing.
- Provide funding for research-based programs that are known to improve math instruction in middle level and high school and to make targeted assistance available to students who are struggling in math.
- Provide funding for states and districts to initiate schoolwide technology initiatives and train school leaders and teachers on how to use new technologies and incorporate them into their instructional practices.

Require that the U.S. Department of Education regularly collect and disseminate the results, data, and best practices of states that are adopting and implementing the CCSS.

NASSP calls on The NGA Center and CCSSO to:

- Educate the public about how CCSS shift the focus from a high school diploma to college and career readiness.
- Launch a public awareness campaign that adequately informs the public about the dramatic changes, including increases in rigor and text complexity, and the expected changes in proficiency rates, that will accompany CCSS.



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- Acknowledge that middle level and high schools will be held accountable for student performance without the benefit of their students having had CCSS-aligned instruction throughout their school years, and offer a realistic plan to roll out the assessments over time, beginning with elementary school and ending with high school.

NASSP calls on states to:

- Adopt and fully implement the CCSS
- Hold public forums with educators, parents, and community leaders to explain the rationale for adopting common standards and assessments aligned to those standards and to discuss how best to implement the new standards and assessments.
- Develop an implementation plan that reexamines current high school graduation requirements and addresses teacher- and principal-preparation programs and professional development programs.
- Provide, in collaboration with local education authorities, robust support services and ongoing professional development for principals, assistant principals, and instructional leaders to build the capacity of schools around those new requirements.
- Provide resources to local education authorities in the form of grants, research, and professional expertise to help them build their capacity to more effectively meet the needs of every student.
- Maximize the advantage of flexibility provided by the U.S. Department of Education to delay penalties and sanctions related to test scores on schools, principals, and teachers.

Design, in collaboration with local education authorities, appropriately aligned curricula to meet those common standards.

NASSP calls on school leaders to:

- Familiarize themselves with the CCSS and how they differ from current state standards, and participate in professional development specifically designed for school leaders.
- Collaborate with staff members to develop a transition plan as your state begins to implement the CCSS and new assessments.
- Begin at once to retrain the entire teaching staff, particularly in the areas of cross-content literacy, including argumentative writing, higher-order thinking skills, application of lessons to real-world situations, and active engagement of all students.
- Assess and align the school's technology capacity to accommodate the requirements for computer-based assessments.
- Provide professional development opportunities to instructional staff members to help build their capacity to teach to higher standards and provide students with the supports they need to achieve them.



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- Implement schoolwide literacy initiatives that emphasize close reading, various forms of writing, and listening and speaking across all content areas.
- Implement interdisciplinary numeracy initiatives that reinforce mathematics skills across all content areas, especially in science courses.
- Engage in vertical articulation discussions with feeder schools to ensure K-12 alignment of math and literacy curricula with the CCSS.