

# Just the FAQs on California's Common Core State Standards

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## Q. Where did the California Common Core State Standards come from?

A. Calls for better alignment of standards across the United States started several decades ago, as educators recognized the increasing need for standardization of grade level content to better serve students moving around the nation. During the last four presidential administrations this topic has been prominent in the education platform of both the Democratic and Republican parties.

Most recently, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governor's Association spearheaded the development of a set of common core standards in math and English language arts. These standards were developed with input and feedback from representatives of parent groups, higher education, K-12 teachers, the research and business community, civil rights groups and state leaders. Public feedback was also sought during the spring of 2010, before a final version of the Common Core State Standards was released in June 2010.

*Additional resources about the development of the Common Core Standards:* [ci.cusd.com/standards](http://ci.cusd.com/standards) • [www.cgcs.org/page/244](http://www.cgcs.org/page/244) • [www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntinstitute](http://www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntinstitute) • [www.achievethecore.org](http://www.achievethecore.org)

## Q. How did the Common Core State Standards become a part of California's Standards?

A. Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. Common standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. California implemented statewide educational standards in the late 1990s, and has assessed students on these standards since the 2001 inclusion of the California Standards Test (CST) into the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program.

In 2010, California adopted a new set of standards that, in part, include the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math. In 2013, California adopted the Next Generation Science Standards which include some nationwide science standards. Standards in the areas of history/social science, health, art, visual and performing arts, world language and physical education continue to be those developed specifically for California. Since 2010, the great majority of states have adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math.

## Q. Are these new standards less rigorous than the current California content standards (are we “dumbing down” the curriculum)?

A. We have found the standards to be rigorous and more focused than the state's previous content standards. Since the state first adopted new standards, educators in Clovis Unified have spent significant time studying, researching and evaluating their content. Our study of the new content standards has found that they are rigorous, grounded in effective instructional practices, and designed to better prepare students to think critically and apply their knowledge in the real world of work and college.

There has been some criticism of these new standards because of concerns over the federal government's use of their adoption as criteria for a state's eligibility for Race to the Top funds, which California did not receive. In our research and assessment of the standards we have found that, regardless of their origins or history, they are a positive step toward preparing our students with the critical thinking and depth of knowledge needed to be successful in the world today.

## Q. Are school districts losing their local control of what is taught in the classroom?

A. Clovis Unified has always aligned our written, taught and tested curriculum, and will continue to have control over that process. We use the standards as the basis for *what* students are supposed to know and be able to do. *How* we deliver education to our students will continue to be locally determined. Just as we have in the past, Clovis Unified will customize the way we deliver instruction, the textbooks and educational resources we use, and our educational environment to reflect the expectations of our community. Opportunities will continue to exist for teachers, parents and community members to offer input on curriculum and textbook recommendations, and to be heavily involved in education in Clovis Unified.

**Q. Won't the Common Core State Standards "dumb down" the teaching of America's students by emphasizing "perspectives" and "critical thinking" over content and facts? And doesn't Common Core utilize uniform standards that not only eliminate more advanced material from previous teaching curriculums, but also prohibit teachers from teaching students individually; instead promoting a "one size fits all" approach to teaching?**

A. The standards are not a curriculum but serve as targets for what students should know and be able to do. Curricula are the instructional plans and strategies that teachers use to help student reach those expectations. CUSD uses the standards as a basis for developing our own curricula by designing our own curriculum guides, choosing appropriate instructional strategies, developing engaging learning activities, and adjusting instruction accordingly to meet their individual needs.

Teams of Clovis Unified teachers have been working on the development of our own local curriculum and assessments to guide classroom instruction for our students for several years and their work will continue into the future.

**Q. Will schools no longer assign homework to students?**

A. No. We will continue to assign homework for students, with the intention that homework supports classroom learning, and does not introduce new concepts not yet covered in class. Clovis Unified will continue to deliver to our students a rigorous and high quality learning environment that prepares them for life after high school.

**Q. Won't all student work be done on the computer and parents won't have access to their children's learning.**

A. No. While technology will play an increased role in learning (reflective of our society as a whole), students will continue to participate in direct instruction lessons that focus on face-to-face and small group learning. The ability to effectively utilize technology to support learning is an important part of preparing students for the real worlds of work and post-secondary education. Because California is moving to a computerized assessment model (away from the paper and pencil standardized tests students have taken for years), students will be using computers more frequently in class. An example of how the district has previously approached the infusion of technology to create vibrant classroom curriculum is the Learning with Laptops program currently in place at our intermediate schools.

Parent involvement will also continue to be an important part of the learning process, and parents will have the same or greater access to their student's learning as we move to implement the new state standards. Involved parents are a critical component of successful learning and we will continue to encourage and foster parental involvement in our schools and classrooms.

## **Questions about English Language Arts Standards**

**Q. Doesn't Common Core do away with kids' opportunity to learn great literature by requiring that by the twelfth grade students must spend 70% of their time reading informational text?**

- A. We continue to read classic literature in our classrooms. English language arts teachers alone are not responsible for teaching informational text. The standards stress that reading should occur in other subject areas as well, including Science, Social Science/History, and Economics/Government. This is nothing new. The majority of our students already meet this recommended percentage across subject matters.

**Q. Will handwriting no longer be taught to students?**

- A. In California, cursive writing remains a standard in both third and fourth grade.
- ✓ Grade 3 Language Standard 1.j.- Write legibly in cursive allowing margins and correct spacing between letters in a word and words in a sentence.
  - ✓ Grade 4 Language Standard 1.h.- Write fluidly and legibly in cursive.

**Questions about Mathematics Standards**

**Q. Are the new math standards rigorous enough for students to be prepared to access higher level math courses?**

- A. The math standards are more rigorous than the 1997 California math standards. By completing three years of high school math, students will be better prepared, having covered some Advanced Math (Pre-Calculus) topics and more statistics.

**Q. Won't schools no longer offer AP Calculus or AP Statistics because students will not have the opportunity to accelerate their math instruction under the new standards?**

- A. Clovis Unified will continue to offer advanced math courses like AP Calculus. Math pathways have been developed that allow students to access accelerated math instruction at several levels. Students can accelerate by taking the first high school math course (Math 1) in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Honors Math 2 and Honors Math 3 will include all the standard Advanced Math topics so students can then enroll in AP Calculus or AP Statistics after Honors Math 3.

**Q. Are the new high school math standards rigorous and organized?**

- A. Yes. Clovis Unified high school math teachers analyzed the standards, decided in which course those standards should be and grouped the standards into units based upon their mathematical expertise. Both California and Clovis Unified have added topics to the courses where a need was identified.
- ✓ Math 8 – 7 units of Pre-Algebra/Algebra, 3 units of Geometry, 1 unit of Statistics
  - ✓ Math 1 – 6 units of Algebra 1, 1 unit of Statistics, 5 units of Geometry
  - ✓ Math 2 – 8 units of Geometry, 1 unit of Statistics, 3 units of Algebra 2
  - ✓ Math 3 – 6 units of Algebra 2, 1 unit each of Statistics, Geometry and Trigonometry

**Q. Why are statistics and student explanations/justification in the new standards?**

- A. Statistics and data analysis is included in Math 1, 2 and 3 because students need to be able to understand data and be able to ask clarifying questions to verify the authenticity of any data. Students need to learn to support their answers similar to any situation in college or in the work force. Research shows that if students can explain the process to someone else the student will remember the concept longer.

**Q. Will kids no longer be required to learn math facts?**

- A. Clovis Unified will continue to require students to learn math facts since being able to fluently add, subtract, multiply and divide are critical skills on which math knowledge is built.

**Q. Will math topics be left out of the math 1, 2 and 3 curriculum leaving student unprepared for higher math courses?**

A. The Clovis Unified teacher team developing our curriculum for these courses are experienced in the instruction of Algebra 2, Pre-Calculus and Calculus and will ensure that all necessary topics are included in Math 3 for student success in higher math classes.

**Q. Were the Next Generation Science Standards created by the federal government?**

A. The federal government was not involved in the effort to develop the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). It was state-led. No federal funds were used to develop the standards.