

Common Core (CC) *Bismarck Public Schools*

Introduction

- Bismarck Public Schools has a tradition of providing academic excellence and holding students to high standards in grades K-12.
- Colleges and the workplace are demanding different skills and more content knowledge of our students. We need to shift the focus from high school completion to college and career readiness for ALL students.
- Standards help define the knowledge and skills that will prepare students for college and for the workforce of today, regardless of the teacher or the school.
- We want to teach critical thinking, problem solving, real world application, and communication skills similar to top-notch education programs in other countries. The Common Core (CC) supports this
- We hope you will read this information to educate yourself about the facts about the Common Core State Standards.

Common Questions about Common Core

What is Common Core?

Common Core State Standards spell out the English Language Arts (ELA) and math goals for students at each grade level from kindergarten through grade 12. They are clear goals for student learning and direct all teachers to develop a rigorous education, regardless of where students live. The purpose of standards is to ensure that all students who graduate from high school will be successful when they take their initial math and English courses in college (2 or 4 year) or when they enter the workforce.

Are standards the same as curriculum?

No. Standards are benchmarks for what all students should learn. Curriculum (what is taught), textbooks, and other instructional materials are decided at the local level. Teachers decide how they will use those resources to meet and exceed the standards. The Common Core does not dictate how teachers will teach. Teachers must continue to devise lesson plans and tailor their instruction to meet the individual needs of students in their classroom.

Why do we need standards?

Standards are nothing new in education. They've been around for more than 20 years. In North Dakota, education standards are reviewed about every 7 years to ensure schools are teaching what students need to know to be successful in today's society and to meet the increasingly higher expectations for student achievement. Thus, state and local standards have changed over time, as they should.

Example: In the past, Bismarck Public Schools kindergarten students were to be able to recognize 40 high frequency words (is, the, you, as, of, are, etc.) according to the standard. BPS

teachers have increased the number of sight words to 75 because, by mid-year, many children can already recognize 40 words. Thus the rigor of the standard was increased at the local level.

Who developed the Common Core?

The Common Core is a state-led, collaborative effort to raise the bar on English and math standards. It is a product of the Council of Chief State School Officers (the top education officers in each state) and National Governor's Association, along with Achieve, a Washington-based nonprofit working to increase the number of students who graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Common Core is not a federal mandate.

Why did they create the Common Core?

Common Core grew out of a concern that Americans need to improve education to remain competitive in the global marketplace. The CC also provides continuity in education for students who move from state to state. These English and math standards have so far been adopted voluntarily by 45 states and the District of Columbia. North Dakota adopted CC in June of 2011 after seeking public input in September of 2010. Minnesota adopted the English standards. Alaska, Texas, Nebraska and Virginia have not adopted Common Core.

Did North Dakota have input into the standards?

More than 60 educators from across North Dakota, including 5 from Bismarck Public Schools, spent a great deal of time comparing state standards to the Common Core. They found the Common Core standards to be equally as rigorous as the ND State Standards they replaced and, in many cases, more so. Common Core standards emphasize real learning and understanding of the material through critical thinking and applying what students have learned versus short-term memorization of answers or formulas for a test.

Why is it important for educators to know the truth about the Common Core?

People ask questions of and listen to those who are in schools every day and know what is being taught. Educators know how much time and effort has gone into developing standards for our school district to ensure our students get the best education possible and can compete in this global 21st Century society. North Dakota United, which represents about 80% of the teachers in the state, supports the new Common Core standards, as do the Bismarck and Mandan Public School Districts and the Light of Christ Catholic Schools in Bismarck.

Will there be a state assessment based on these new standards?

Yes. It will replace the old North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA). The Spring NDSA will be tested in 2014 and fully implemented in 2015.

Is the standards based grading system used by BPS part of the Common Core?

No. Standards based grading isn't part of Common Core. It's something Bismarck Public Schools has used for several years. Parents of students in grades K-5 are familiar with standards based grading, which uses a number system to show a student's specific level of proficiency instead of the more subjective A-F grading system. Our teachers who are currently implementing

standards based grading say parents feel more informed about their child's learning progress under the new system. Here is an explanation of what the numbers mean:

.05 The student demonstrates misunderstandings about the knowledge and/or skills required to meet the end of the year standard for that grade level.

1.0 The student demonstrates beginning understanding of the grade level standard.

2.0 The student demonstrates partial understanding of the grade level standard.

3.0 The student demonstrates proficiency with the grade level standard.

4.0 The student demonstrates understanding that exceeds grade level standard.

Bismarck Public Schools plans to implement standards based grading in grades 6-8 as well.

Why are some people upset about the Common Core?

1. There is a lot of misinformation about the Common Core. Some people think it's about a specific curriculum that is being taught or books that are being read by students. That is not the case. The Common Core standards are educational benchmarks in English Language Arts (ELA) and math that should be met for students to be successful later in college or career life. The standards are not the "ceiling" of what is taught; teachers can go further with students.
2. In most states, the Common Core did not require approval by state lawmakers. Instead, it was a state agency, like the ND Department of Public Instruction, which adopted the educational standards for schools, as it has done for many years. In North Dakota, 60 educators from public and private K-12 schools and from higher education made recommendations to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction.
3. When people have challenged Bismarck Public Schools about the Common Core standards, we have asked them to show us which English and math standards they disagree with. Many times they have not read our local or state English and math standards, or they cannot point to any that are objectionable. BPS is always willing to look at any standard or curriculum resource a parent finds questionable. Parents can choose to opt out of certain curriculum for their own child, but not for all children. Bismarck Public Schools has policies and procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials (IFAA & IFAB) and for Reconsideration of Instructional Materials (KNBA).

Will other subject areas get Common Core State Standards?

Not on the national level. The effort led by the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governor's Association is for math and English Language Arts (ELA) only, though states and local school districts may have their own standards for other subject areas. Educators nationwide are involved in efforts to develop frameworks for subjects like science, world language, health, etc.

Where can I find the Common Core State Standards so I can review them?

Here are some links to the ND Dept. of Public Instruction pages about the standards:

http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/common_core.shtm

<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/content.shtm>.

Here's a link to the standards used in Bismarck Public Schools; specific courses are on the left:
<http://www.bismarckschools.org/district/curriculum/>

The National PTA also endorses standards and the Common Core:
<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/standard/pamphlets.shtm>

Here is another source of information for parents, and there are news articles at the bottom of this document: <http://www.parenttoolkit.com/>

Myths:

Myth: The Common Core is the federal takeover of education; it should be called Obamacore.

Truth: The Obama administration wasn't involved in writing the Common Core, nor is it a federal mandate, though the President does support these standards.

Myth: The Common Core "dumbs down" our state and local standards.

Truth: ND educators looked at the most recent state standards and the Common Core. They found the Common Core is more rigorous in many ways.

Myth: The Common Core standards take away local control.

Truth: Local school districts have control of what is taught and how it is taught. Common Core is not a curriculum. It's a set of English and math standards for each grade level, so that if a student moves to another state, the educational expectations are the same.

Myth: Teachers will be told what and how to teach.

Truth: Teachers have always had input in the development of standards AND into the curriculum (what they teach) and the best method to deliver instruction (how they teach).

Myth: Schools will no longer teach higher level math.

Truth: In Bismarck Public Schools, the rigor has increased in all core high school math classes, so all students are learning higher level math, not just those to choose to take additional math courses. BPS students are required to take 3 high school math classes for graduation, Algebra 1 and above. BPS also has many higher level math courses, as well as Advanced Placement math for college credit.

Myth: Students won't read as much literature or fiction in school under Common Core.

Truth: By high school, 70% of what older students read in all subject areas should be "informational" and 30% should be "literature" to prepare students for the kind of reading they will do in college and careers. In Bismarck Public school English classes, reading is closer to 70% literature and 30% informational.

Myth: There's a list of pornographic books that students must read, like *Dreaming in Cuban*.

Truth: In the appendix to the English standards, there is a list of “exemplars” which are “samples” of some of the text from books that have the same level of complexity, for example, as what might be read in class at a certain grade level. These “sample texts” are a guidepost for teachers, not a required reading list. Bismarck Public Schools has not purchased *Dreaming in Cuban*. BPS has policies in place for the selection of appropriate instructional materials.

Myth: Teachers can’t teach spelling as part of the Common Core.

Truth: There is nothing in the Common Core that tells us how to teach spelling. Some teachers may not be doing as many spelling tests because they’re working with students to apply their spelling knowledge to their writing assignments.

Myth: The Common Core standards are too demanding; we are expecting too much of our kids.

Truth: We should provide rigorous, relevant, and challenging content for our students. We can’t teach the students of today based on our pasts as adults.

Myth: Common Core State Standards include teacher and student testing.

Truth: There is no testing component in the nationally-developed Common Core. The state has and does require student assessment, as well as teacher assessment to be certified to teach.

Myth: Common Core doesn’t care if students get the right answer.

Truth: Students need to know how to get to the right answer and explain how they got it; they don’t all have to use the same method to get the right answer.

Myth: The Common Core removes the teaching of cursive writing in schools.

Truth: No version of the ND state standards has ever required teaching cursive, though teachers are free to do so.

Myth: The Common Core promotes Jihad and Islam and bans teaching the Bible; it teaches sex education to kindergarten students; it’s a conspiracy to make our children weak so we can be taken over by communists or radical Islamists.

Truth: The Common Core is standards for teaching English and math only.

Myth: The Common Core testing company will have access to my child’s personal data.

Truth: According to the ND Dept. of Public Instruction, a recent study showed that the Smarter Balanced state assessment offers the most viable option for state tests, satisfying the need for test security, student data privacy, cost effectiveness, and involvement by ND educators in the development of the test.

Myth: There are national experts who do not support the Common Core standards.

Truth: You can find experts, and those who claim to be experts, on both sides of the issue:

- In 2010, the Fordham Institute determined the national Common Core standards were clearer and more rigorous than standards in English and math in 33 states. In North Dakota, ELA standards received a D grade in 2010; ND math standards had a grade of C.

- The Dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and a team of researchers concluded the Common Core standards were not a significant improvement over states' previous standards.
- Michigan State University research found Common Core math standards were very similar to those of high-achieving nations on a well-known international assessment (TIMSS), and on average, states with standards like the Common Core performed better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) used in the U.S.

Here are some news media stories about the Common Core from national and local sources:

The Associated Press ran these reports nationwide in December 2013:

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/national/critical-thinking-hallmark-of-common-core-class/article_abe8b8b4-92e2-5066-b55f-f63a6043df05.html

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/national/for-critics-of-common-core-educational-folly/article_92e67ede-00b8-52b2-9659-3dfdd8228043.html

Bismarck Tribune education reporter Hannah Johnson has done stories about Common Core:

<http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/0a40a01c-037f-11e3-80d8-0019bb2963f4.html>

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/common-core-implementation-underway/article_a70e36aa-6e43-11e3-8b0a-001a4bcf887a.html

http://bismarcktribune.com/news/local/education/opposition-group-to-common-core-starts-up/article_744d3836-6e45-11e3-a3c2-001a4bcf887a.html

If you have questions or concerns, e-mail Bismarck Public Schools Community Relations Director: renae_walker@bismarckschools.org.

Last update: January 17, 2014