

Higher Academic Standards: The Common Core State Standards

What are the Common Core State Standards?

Common Core State Standards are a set of standards that were developed by state leaders to ensure that every student graduates high school prepared for college or the workforce, regardless of the state in which they live. The standards are designed to set clear expectations of what students should know in each grade and subject. They reflect rigorous learning benchmarks when compared to countries whose students currently outperform American students on international assessments. States voluntarily choose whether to adopt the standards. To date, 46 states, including the District of Columbia, have adopted Common Core standards. The initiative is led by the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve.

Why did Tennessee adopt Common Core?

Tennessee is committed to ensuring that high school students graduate prepared for college and career. Currently, only 15 percent of Tennessee students are college-ready.¹ The state took an initial step to raise standards by adopting the Tennessee Diploma Project standards in 2009 to meet this challenge. By joining nearly every other state to develop and implement Common Core standards, Tennessee is now taking a further step to enhance the quality of instruction and learning for its students. By adopting Common Core, teachers in Tennessee will be able to better learn from and collaborate with teachers in other states, since all teachers will follow a common set of standards.

How will Common Core affect teaching in Tennessee?

Common Core standards will represent a significant shift in instructional practice for educators across the state. Although there is some alignment between Tennessee's standards and the Common Core, the Common Core requires a deeper engagement with a smaller number of standards than the state currently requires. Specifically, students will be required to master more critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Recognizing the new depth to which Common Core subject areas must be taught, teachers and school and district leaders will need to receive comprehensive training on implementation of the standards to develop a deep understanding of what they require. The table below compares a subset of the Tennessee Diploma Project (TDP) and Common Core standards in fourth grade math.

Grade 4 Math Standards

Tennessee Diploma Project	Common Core
Add and subtract fractions with like and unlike denominators and simplify the answer	Compare two fractions with different numerators and different denominators
Given a set of data or a graph, describe the distribution of the data using median, range, or mode	Make a line plot to display a data set of measurements in fractions of a unit
Solve problems using whole number division with one or two digit divisors	Find whole-number quotients and remainders with up to four-digit dividends and one-digit divisors

¹ ACT. (2011). 2011 ACT National and State Scores. Retrieved from: <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2011/states.html>.

The transition to Common Core will also include the adoption of new assessments that will test what students have learned under the new standards. These assessments will replace the current TCAP tests. These assessments will be administered online and include both an end-of-year final exam and periodic assessments throughout the school year that will allow teachers to monitor their students' progress and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. Tennessee is working with a number of other states in the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) Consortium to design these new assessments.

What is the timeline for implementing Common Core?

Common Core standards will be phased into English/language arts and math across all grade levels in the coming academic years, with full implementation scheduled for 2013–14. These standards will require new approaches to teaching, and students should expect enhanced rigor in their courses.

