

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO

**COMMON CORE  
LEARNING**

New York State  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
*everychild.one voice.*

**nysut**  
*A Union of Professionals*





**Working together  
for our children**

## Dear Parents,

Until now, each state has had its own set of student learning standards. Instruction has varied greatly from district to district, and even from school to school. That's why New York State PTA and NYSUT support the concept of Common Core Standards: The goal is to provide a clear, consistent "core" of standards so all children have access to an excellent education, regardless of ZIP code.

New York is one of many states across the nation that have voluntarily adopted the new Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Math.

Of course, standards alone don't advance student learning. Educators must be given the resources, tools and time to adjust their practice. Parents need to know about upcoming changes in what their children will be expected to know and do. And students must be provided with appropriate instruction, learning materials and assessments to measure their progress.

Our organizations, from their very beginnings, have shared a steadfast commitment to improving the education of all students. This Parent's Guide is a natural extension of that commitment — and was developed to assist parents with understanding the new Common Core curriculum movement and the need to work together to ensure our students' success.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lana Ajemian".

Lana Ajemian, President  
New York State PTA®



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard C. Iannuzzi".

Richard Iannuzzi, President  
New York State United Teachers

# COMMON CORE



## What are the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association. The goal of the CCSS is to provide a single set of clear and consistent educational standards in math and English language arts that states can share and voluntarily adopt. A total of 45 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards.



## Why do we need new standards?

Until now, every state had its own standards and different expectations of student performance. Common standards will help ensure that all students are receiving a high quality education consistently, from school to school and state to state. Common Core standards can provide parents with clear expectations for what children should know and be able to do

when they graduate high school or advance to a particular grade level. Common Core standards provide consistency for parents and students during transitions and allow parents to continue to support student learning regardless of changes in ZIP code. In addition, evidence-based standards will more effectively prepare American students to keep up with their peers around the world.



## What does Common Core look like in the classroom?

Common Core standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what students need to learn, but they will not dictate how teachers should teach. Common Core standards are not curriculum. Teachers and schools will continue to devise curriculum, including lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and school boards will continue to make curriculum decisions.



## Were teachers and parents involved in the creation of the standards?

Yes. Parents and teachers have been a critical voice in the development of the standards. The National PTA, National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Teachers of English and other organizations have been instrumental in bringing

together teachers to provide specific, constructive feedback since the standards were first released in 2010.

### WHY NOW?

- Different standards across states
- Student mobility, military families
- Global competition
- Today's jobs require different skills

### THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:

- Prepare students with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in college and work
- Provide educators, parents and students with clear, focused standards or guideposts
- Set consistent expectations, regardless of a student's ZIP code
- Include both knowledge and the application of subject area
- Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards and standards of top-performing nations
- Are based on real-world application
- Are evidence- and research-based, with guidance on topics to include, when to introduce content, and coherence/focus



## 5 What's happening here in New York?

New York's Board of Regents adopted the P-12 Common Core Learning Standards in ELA/Literacy and Mathematics in January 2011. The standards focus on a deeper level of subject comprehension and set clear expectations for learning. New York teachers were involved in the review process and recommended the state approve additional standards.



## 6 Did New York add anything?

Yes, in 2011, the Board of Regents approved recommended additions to the Common Core State Standards, including prekindergarten standards for both ELA/Literacy and math. Additions to the ELA/Literacy Common Core included an 11<sup>th</sup> standard, "Responding to Literature," and grade-level expectations for student inquiry, culture and diversity.

Math additions included two specific grade-level standards. Kindergartners must develop an understanding of ordinal numbers (first through 10<sup>th</sup>) and first-graders must be able to

recognize and identify coins by their names and values.

The Pre-Kindergarten Foundation standards will serve as a resource guide for pre-K providers, offering a template for professional development and a framework with pre-K instructional activities. The primary purpose of the pre-K standards is to ensure that all students, including children with disabilities and English language learners have rich early learning experiences that prepare them for success in school. Both PTA and NYSUT, however, oppose pre-K-2 standardized testing, except for diagnostic purposes.

### Key ELA shifts

Read as much non-fiction as fiction

Learn about the world by reading

Read more challenging material closely

Discuss reading using evidence

Write non-fiction using evidence

Increase academic vocabulary



Source: EngageNY.org



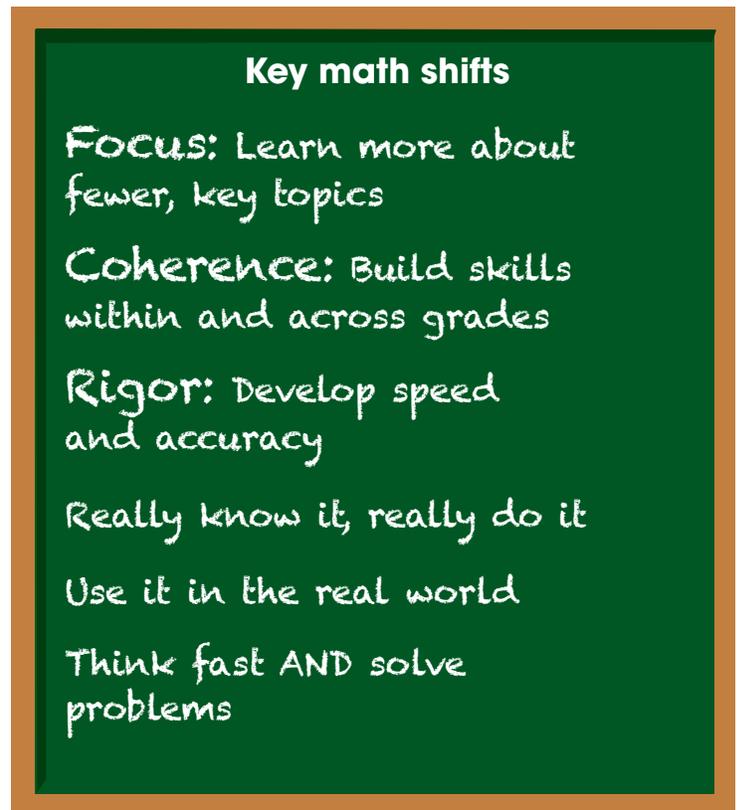
## What's new for ELA?

Non-fiction makes up the majority of required reading in high school, college and the workplace. Since informational text is harder for students to understand than narrative text, more instructional time is needed to practice. The recommended time spent on literary texts to informational texts at the elementary level is 50/50; at the middle level is 45/55 and at the high school level is 30/70.

An emphasis on reading, writing and speaking based on evidence is another shift. This became part of the Common Core Learning Standards because most college and workplace writing requires evidence, being able to take a position or inform others through citing evidence.

The shift to regular practice with complex texts and academic language occurred because research showed that there is a gap in the difficulty of what students read by the end of high school and what they are required to read in both college and careers.

**TIP:** Look for “word problems” in real life. Have your child double or halve a recipe. Figure out how much soil is needed for a garden by measuring the length, width and depth.



Source: EngageNY.org

For all of these shifts, the emphasis is on reading more complex texts. The features of complex text include density of information, multiple and/or subtle themes and purposes, unfamiliar settings or events, complex sentences, uncommon vocabulary, longer paragraphs and a text structure that is less narrative.



## What's new for math?

In math, instructional shifts focus on fewer, more central standards, building core understandings and linking mathematical concepts to real-world skills. In developing the shifts in mathematics, the designers of the standards moved

away from what has been termed the “mile wide and an inch deep” approach to mathematics instruction in the United States.

The Common Core Learning Standards for mathematics stress conceptual understanding of key ideas and organizing principles of mathematics such as place value or the laws of arithmetic. The standards are designed to allow students to progress through mathematics in a coherent way, building skills within and across grades.

The Common Core defines what students should be able to do in mathematics through

grade-specific standards, emphasizing speed, accuracy and real-life problem-solving skills.



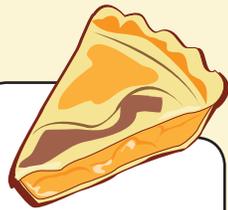
## Will state tests be different?

Yes. State tests aligned with the New York State Common Core Learning Standards were first administered to grade 3-8 students in April 2013. The new assessments are different from past tests, with students responding to multiple

## What will the new tests look like?

### OLD: Grade 5 state math

Pierre is making an apple crumb pie using the items below.



#### APPLE CRUMB PIE

|                |                      |
|----------------|----------------------|
| 1/3 cup flour  | 4 cups sliced apples |
| 1/3 cup sugar  | 1/3 cup sugar        |
| 1/4 cup butter | 1/2 cup raisins      |

How much total sugar must Pierre use to make the pie crumb and filling?

- F 7/12 cup
- G 2/6 cup
- H 3/4 cup
- J 2/3 cup

### NEW: Common Core grade 5 math

Tito and Luis are stuffed with pizza! Tito ate one-fourth of a cheese pizza. Tito ate three-eighths of a pepperoni pizza. Tito ate one-half of a mushroom pizza. Luis ate five-eighths of a cheese pizza. Luis ate the other half of the mushroom pizza. All the pizzas were the same size. Tito says he ate more pizza than Luis because Luis did not eat any pepperoni pizza. Luis says they each ate the same amount

of pizza. Who is correct? Show all your mathematical thinking.



choice questions but also to open-ended items where they must show their work. ELA content will be based on non-fiction and original texts such as speeches or letters where students will be required to draw conclusions and support those conclusions with evidence from these sources. Math content will be more complex with students being challenged to solve multi-step problems and real-life applications.

Beginning in 2014, new math and English Regents exams in high school will be aligned to the Common Core. Current plans for 2015 include the expected availability of multi-state tests designed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). While the New York Board of Regents has not yet decided if the state will adopt PARCC assessments or how they would be used, New York is a governing member of this 25-state consortium and will be influential in the development of these tests. Finally, the Regents expect that future assessment of Common Core skills will be computer-based. This transition could begin as early as the spring of 2015.



## **10 How will schools and educators be held accountable?**

Schools and individual educators are held accountable using student test performance combined with additional measures such as classroom observation. Currently, 20 percent of each

educator's performance is based on growth in student test scores on state assessments. An additional 20 percent is based on local test results.

Where student tests are not available or not applicable, student performance is measured using locally developed student learning objectives, or SLO's. The final 60 percent of an educator's evaluation is measured using classroom observation and other evidence of teacher or principal performance. Local measures of student performance and SLO's are developed collaboratively by school districts and local unions and approved by the State Education Department.



## **11 How can I help my child at home?**

Learning does not end in the classroom. Children need help and support at home to succeed in their studies. Try to create a quiet place for your child to study and carve out time every day when your child can concentrate on reading, writing and math uninterrupted by friends, family or other distractions. Keep informed about what your child is working on. This will help you know if your child needs help. If your child needs extra help, work with his or her teacher to find opportunities for tutoring, to get involved in clubs after school, or to find other resources. See page 9 for parent tips.



## What are the challenges ahead?

While most educators support the Common Core, issues related to instructional implementation, student testing and the use of test results have introduced debate about the potential benefits of Common Core.

**Implementation:** Any major change takes time, attention to sequence of activities and opportunity to use experience to improve. New standards require development of new curriculum, new instructional methods, new materials and other resources. Extensive professional development will be required. Successful implementation will always be “a work in progress.”

Thorough evaluation of classroom practices, realistic funding and assessment of school calendar constraints will be necessary to realize the benefits of Common Core instruction.

**Student testing:** The recent overreliance on standardized testing has led to a de-emphasis on the basic purpose of student testing: to improve instruction. Continued attention must be given to the effects, sometimes unintended, of test length, frequency and time devoted

to student test preparation.

Equally important will be timely availability of test results to teachers and how those results can be used to improve quality of instruction and richness of curriculum.

In the end, the success of Common Core standards will rest not with results of an individual test but with real-world evidence that:

- New York is continuing its trend of recent improvement in high school graduation rates;
- The need for non-credit, post-high school remediation in basic skills is reduced;
- Students are better able to apply skills necessary to compete successfully in a global economy; and
- Instruction encourages a love and appreciation for lifelong learning that enriches all aspects of life.

**TIP:** Look for ways to practice academic, or school vocabulary, with your child at home. Examples of school language include such words as trace, analyze, infer, summarize, contrast and predict. Ask your child’s teacher for more academic words that will be covered in your child’s grade level.



## What can parents do to help their child prepare for Common Core learning?



Read a combination of fiction and non-fiction aloud or with your child. Look for subjects that interest your child — from sports heroes to dinosaurs. Select more difficult passages over time.



Read more informational texts including newspapers, magazines, technical manuals, science and social studies articles and books.



Talk with your child and have him or her explain things.



Encourage writing at home.



Help your children know/memorize basic math facts.



Discuss and “do” real life math with your children.



Look for “word problems” in real life.



Encourage a good work ethic.



Let your children see you read and “do” math.



Discuss with your children their performance in school and what they are learning.



Talk about tests with your child and be positive and encouraging.



Talk with your child’s teacher(s) about his or her performance in school.



Talk with your children about the importance of graduating from high school ready for college and career success.

# Resources

- **National Parent Teacher Association** offers grade-by-grade guides for Common Core State Standards. Available in English and Spanish for K-8 and grades 9-12. Download at [www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583](http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583)
- **New York State United Teachers (NYSUT)** has a special section on its website for Common Core materials. Go to [www.nysut.org/commoncore](http://www.nysut.org/commoncore)
- The **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)** offers grade-by-grade activities, explanations, and parent letters for Common Core. Go to [www.aft.org/issues/standards/webinar.cfm](http://www.aft.org/issues/standards/webinar.cfm)  
  
AFT also offers a Common Core brochure for parents of English language learners. Go to [www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/ColorinColorado\\_CCSS\\_links.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pdfs/teachers/ColorinColorado_CCSS_links.pdf)
- **National Education Association (NEA)** offers input from a panel of educators in "Six Ways the Common Core is Good for Students." Go to [www.neatoday.org/2013/05/10/six-ways-the-common-core-is-good-for-students/](http://www.neatoday.org/2013/05/10/six-ways-the-common-core-is-good-for-students/)
- **New York State Education Department** has posted Common Core materials at [www.EngageNY.org](http://www.EngageNY.org)

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