

The Truth About the Connecticut Core Standards

Myth #1: The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is a new development and the idea of rigorous standards has only recently been pushed on to local school districts.

The Truth... Connecticut has had standards for a long time, and they have been revised regularly. This is because standards need to be revised and updated over time, rather than remaining stagnant.

- The Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) were based upon the former set of Connecticut Standards (also called the Connecticut Framework)
- Connecticut adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010 and refers to the Connecticut version as the Connecticut Core Standards
- The Smarter Balanced Assessments that will be administered this spring as a “field test” (a trial run to test the questions and ensure that results will be reliable) are aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards and serve the same purpose as the CMT and CAPT which have been administered in Connecticut for more than 20 years.

The CCSS create consistent learning goals for all students regardless of where they live or go to school. Prior to the development of the CCSS, each state developed its own educational standards and, as a result, expectations for student learning have varied widely from state to state. With the CCSS, parents can be assured that their children are learning the same rigorous academic standards as other students across Connecticut and across the country. Having consistent standards also provides students, parents, and teachers with a clear understanding of what students should be learning in each grade level.

Myth #2: The Common Core State Standards are an attempt by the Federal government to create a National Curriculum

The Truth... Public school districts are responsible for writing and implementing their own curricula aligned to the state-adopted standards for each grade level. State standards set expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed in life beyond PK-12 schooling, but Plainville has the responsibility of deciding what we teach and how we teach it. Common Core was created by a bipartisan initiative of the National Governors Association and state education superintendents to replace the patchwork of English and mathematics guidelines across the country with a single set of “college and career ready” standards. Connecticut, like many New England states, has always had strong and rigorous standards.

In Plainville, the curriculum for each discipline has always been aligned with the Connecticut State Standards, but our teachers make the decisions about how to instruct

our students to maximize their learning. For example, the CCSS or Connecticut Core Standards do not dictate that all districts must use the readers' and writers' workshop approach to learning. This was a decision that Plainville teachers made some years ago, and the new standards will not change that decision.

Myth #3: The Common Core is driven by large commercial textbook companies and dictates specific materials all school districts must purchase, removing the ability to teach classic literature or promote the arts and creativity in our students.

The Truth...The Common Core does not require the purchase of or the teaching methodologies required by a specific set of materials. Plainville teachers have always been highly involved in the selection of textbooks and other teaching materials. Textbook adoptions occur on a cycle of between 7 and 10 years, and teams of teachers review all materials on the market before a recommendation is made to the board of education.

The Common Core does not prohibit the teaching of "the classics" or other literature. In fact, the Appendix lists a wide variety of literary texts, such as *Little Women*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and a variety of plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Williams, and Sophocles. Many of the texts on the list have been studied for decades. What the Core does recommend is that we balance the reading of literary text with the reading of informational text. In English class this might mean reading literary criticism and writing their own critiques. But, more importantly, it engages social studies, science, and teachers of technical subjects in the reading of informational text. Examining and analyzing primary source documents can provide powerful learning for students when compared to reading about those documents in a textbook.

There's plenty of room for poetry, the arts, and sciences in our curriculum! In fact, our students are reading and analyzing poetry more often under the new Connecticut Core Standards than they were under the old framework. To develop the skills of reading a text carefully and studying just how language is used to convey meaning, there is no better vehicle than poetry. To help students understand a cultural or historical context, music and art often give a clearer portrait than an expository text. Under the Connecticut Core Standards, we are helping students learn to "read" a work of art and uncover the "story" behind the painting or sculpture. Plainville's common sense approach to the Common Core Standards combines the best of our teaching practices with a set of clearly articulated standards with the result of improving learning.

Myth #4: The Common Core State Standards are too difficult for our students.

The Truth... Whenever a state (Connecticut included) makes a transition from one set of standards to a new set of standards, it takes time for students to "catch up" with the new standards. So, yes, in states that have already implemented the new standards and have begun the assessment program related to the new standards, there have been decreases in student performance on the test. In Plainville, we began the transition to the new standards two years ago. We expect that our students will have some adjustments to make in terms of meeting the expectations of the new test, but we

also believe that students can and will be successful as they become more accustomed to the demands of the curriculum and the expectations of the test. Our efforts over the last three years to align our curriculum to the standards, adjust and improve our instructional practices to engage students in their learning, and insure students and teachers have access to the right technology, will certainly place our students in an advantageous position during this transition.

Links for more information:

[A 3-Minute Video Overview](http://vimeo.com/51933492) (<http://vimeo.com/51933492>)

Read the Standards (<http://www.corestandards.org/read-the-standards/>)

National PTA Parents' Page: <http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

Supporting Your Child on the Common Core Standards
<http://www.commoncoreworks.org/Page/366>