

## North Carolina Common Core State Standards/Aligned Assessments *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*

### **What are the North Carolina Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?**

These are rigorous learning goals in English language arts and mathematics that outline what students should know at each grade level and upon high school graduation to be prepared for college and career. Students will also acquire the skills—communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—that will be beneficial to them in other core academic subject areas, including history and science.

### **What is meant by “college- and career-ready?”**

ACT, Inc. defines the phrase as “the acquisition of the knowledge and skills a student needs to enroll and succeed in credit-bearing first-year courses at a post-secondary institution (such as a two- or four-year college, trade school, or technical school), without the need for remediation.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, North Carolina businesses seek the skills of communication, collaboration and critical thinking from its workforce needed to compete in the global marketplace.

### **What are the aligned assessments to the CCSS?**

These are higher quality tests aligned to the CCSS that measure students’ application of their academic knowledge and skills. The tests require more short answers—as opposed to multiple-choice questions—that measure students’ critical-thinking, problem solving, and communication skills.

### **Why are the CCSS and the aligned assessments important?**

Students are not being adequately prepared for college that results in students taking remediation courses during their first year. Nor are they adequately prepared for career with the necessary skills to help businesses compete.

- **Six out of 10** surveyed North Carolina employers reported communications “skills gaps” among job applicants, and close to half reported deficiencies in critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.
- **Only 17 percent** of the state’s 2013 high school graduates that took the ACT college admissions test met college readiness benchmarks in all four core subject areas—math, reading, science, and English. Students were least prepared in science.<sup>2</sup>
  - **100 percent** of the state’s 2013 high school graduates took the ACT college admissions test as opposed to the SAT college admissions test.

The aligned assessments are designed to provide teachers with data that can be used to tailor and improve instruction to individual student’s needs to increase student performance and academic progress.

<sup>1</sup> ACT, Inc. (2013). *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013 - National*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/cccr13/pdf/CCCR13-NationalReadinessRpt.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> ACT, Inc. (2013). *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013 – North Carolina*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2013/states/pdf/NorthCarolina.pdf>

### How do the CCSS improve upon the state's prior standards?

The CCSS are internationally benchmarked and allow for North Carolina students to compete with students from the world's academically highest achieving countries like Finland, Canada, Singapore, and United Kingdom.

- U.S. is currently ranked **14th in reading**, **17th in science**, and **25th in mathematics** out of 34 countries taking the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*.
- According to the *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, a conservative think-tank, the CCSS are more rigorous than North Carolina's prior standards in English language arts<sup>3</sup> and mathematics.<sup>4</sup>

### Did the federal government develop the CCSS and require states to adopt them?

No, the federal government was **NOT** involved in the development of the CCSS and is prohibited from directing or controlling states' curricula or program of instruction pursuant to federal law. North Carolina was part of the voluntary, state-led initiative—*Common Core State Standards Initiative*—to establish a common set of rigorous learning goals in English language arts and mathematics so students, parents, and teachers have a clear understanding of what is expected to successfully compete in the global workforce.

### Who started the *Common Core State Standards Initiative* and what other states are involved?

The *National Governors Association (NGA)* and the *Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)* established the initiative in 2009 and facilitated the development of the state standards by various stakeholders. The NGA and CCSSO finalized the state standards in June 2010 and sent them to the states for their consideration.

- 45 states, including North Carolina, District of Columbia, four U.S. territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity voluntarily adopted the state standards between June 2010 and the summer of 2011; and
- Most states are on track for implementation by school year 2014-2015.

### Who are the various stakeholders that helped develop the state standards besides the states?

A variety of individual stakeholders that represented a cross-section of the education, research, and business communities, including business leaders, K-12 teachers, early childhood teachers, college professors, researchers, assessment experts, and school administrators.<sup>5</sup>

### When did North Carolina adopt the CCSS?

North Carolina voluntarily adopted the standards in June 2010 with the approval from its State Board of Education.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas B. Fordham Institute. (2010). *North Carolina – English Language Arts and North Carolina – Mathematics*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from [http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007\\_state\\_education\\_standards\\_common\\_standards/NorthCarolina.pdf](http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/NorthCarolina.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Thomas B. Fordham Institute. (2010). *North Carolina – English Language Arts and North Carolina – Mathematics*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from [http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007\\_state\\_education\\_standards\\_common\\_standards/NorthCarolina.pdf](http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/NorthCarolina.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). Process. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/process>

The state fully implemented the new standards during school year 2012-2013. The State Board of Education held public hearings to hear from residents. It also compared the CCSS to the state's prior standards to determine rigor, clarity, and consistency. It concluded the CCSS are better than the state's prior standards.

### **What will the aligned CCSS assessments mean for the amount of tests that North Carolina students will take each year?**

The state will fully implement the aligned assessments during school year 2014-2015. The objective is **NOT** to have more tests, but to have higher quality tests that help students, teachers, and parents. The higher quality tests require more short answers—as opposed to multiple-choice questions—that measure students' critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills.

### **What will the new assessments mean for student test scores?**

It is expected that student test scores will be lower because of the raised bar of expectations. This is **NOT** a reason to reverse course. Test scores will improve over time because students and teachers have clear expectations. Assessment data will allow teachers to adjust their instruction to individual student's needs to increase student performance and academic progress.

### **Are the CCSS curricula and do they tell teachers how to teach?**

No, the CCSS are **NOT** curricula and do **NOT** tell teachers how to teach. The state, local school districts, individual schools, and teachers have the flexibility to develop the best curricula, instructional materials, and instructional methods for their students to achieve the goals identified by CCSS.

### **Are the CCSS research-based?**

The CCSS are research-based in two senses—content and approach. For example, research shows that complexity of text is an important factor for student achievement, and that there is a link between spoken language and reading. Research also shows links between math achievement and other academic success.<sup>6</sup> Evidence from states with more rigorous standards shows that implementing such standards will increase student achievement. For example, Massachusetts—consistently one of the highest academically-achieving states—enacted several education reforms, including rigorous academic standards, in the 1990s that led to student performance that dramatically increased over time and increased high school graduation rates.<sup>7</sup>

### **How much will implementation of the CCSS and aligned assessments cost the state?**

It all depends on the state's transition and implementation efforts. Cost estimates would include some one-time costs and on-going expenditures such as textbooks, teaching materials, teacher professional development, and technology with technological support.

<sup>6</sup> Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects—Appendix A: Research Supporting Key Elements of the Standards*. Retrieved Oct. 7, 2013 from [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Mass Insight Education. (2013). *Education Reform in Massachusetts 1993-2013: 20 Year Anniversary Report*. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.massinsight.com/publications/ACSC/226/file/3/pubs/2013/05/10/EdReformReport.pdf>

However, these are costs that would occur irrespective of the CCSS and the aligned assessments and would vary according to available local school district resources. Increased costs, however, should not drive a decision **NOT** to invest.

**Will the CCSS invade students' privacy by requiring the collection of personal info?**

The CCSS are **JUST** learning goals and do **NOT** require any type of data collection.

**Who supports the CCSS and the aligned assessments?**

Various corporations and business-related organizations support the CCSS and aligned assessments, including the *North Carolina Chamber of Commerce* and the *North Carolina Bankers Association*.