

New York P-12 Common Core Learning Standards/Aligned Assessments *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*

What are the New York P-12 Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)?

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.”¹ Furthermore, New York 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 CCLS?

These are higher quality tests aligned to the CCLS 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 CCLS 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.

- **Nine out of 10** surveyed executives by the *American Management Association* indicated that soft skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking are important to business expansion, but less than half of those executives rated their employees as above average in those skills.²
- **Only 43 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.³

¹ 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>

² American Management Association. (2010). *AMA 2010 Critical Skills Survey. Executive Summary*. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/Critical Skills Survey Executive Summary.pdf>

³ ACT, Inc. (2013). *The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013 – New York*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2013/states/pdf/New York.pdf>

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.

How do the CCLS improve upon the state's prior standards?

The CCLS are internationally benchmarked and allow for New York 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 CCLS are more rigorous than New York's prior standards in English language arts⁴ and mathematics.⁵

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

No, the federal government was **NOT** involved in the development of the CCLS and is prohibited from directing or controlling states' curricula or program of instruction pursuant to federal law. New York 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 New York, 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.⁶

⁴ Thomas B. Fordham Institute. (2010). *New York – English Language Arts and New York – Mathematics*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/New_York.pdf

⁵ Thomas B. Fordham Institute. (2010). *New York – English Language Arts and New York – Mathematics*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved September 20, 2013 from http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2010/201007_state_education_standards_common_standards/New_York.pdf

When did New York adopt the CCLS?

New York voluntarily adopted the standards in July 2010 with the approval from its State Board of Regents. The state will fully implement the new standards during school year 2013-2014. The State Board of Regents held public hearings to hear from residents. It also compared the CCLS to the state's prior standards to determine rigor, clarity, and consistency. It concluded the CCLS are better than the state's prior standards.

What will the aligned CCLS assessments mean for the amount of tests that New York 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?

The State Department of Education released student scores from transitional tests aligned to the CCLS for grades 3-8 in August 2013. The percentage of students deemed proficient in English language arts (only 31 percent) and mathematics (only 31 percent) is lower than in school year 2011-2012.⁷ It was anticipated 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 CCLS curricula and do they tell teachers how to teach?

No, the CCLS 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 CCLS.

Are the CCLS research-based?

The CCLS 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.⁸ Evidence from states with more rigorous standards shows that implementing such standards will increase student achievement.

⁶ Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). Process. Retrieved October 10, 2013 from <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/process>

⁷ New York State Department of Education. (2013). Press Release – State Education Department Releases Grades 3-8 Assessment Results. Retrieved October 29, 2013 from <http://www.oms.nysed.gov/press/grades-3-8-assessment-results-2013.html>

⁸ 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

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.⁹

How much will implementation of the CCLS 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. However, these are costs that would occur irrespective of the CCLS 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 CCLS invade students' privacy by requiring the collection of personal info?

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

Who supports the CCLS and the aligned assessments?

Various corporations and business-related organizations support the CCLS and the aligned assessments, including the *Business Council of New York State* and the *Center for Economic Growth*.

⁹ 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>