

## **Why is there so much controversy about the Common Core State Standards?**

Before I begin, I feel I must let the reader know that I am not affiliated in any way with the Common Core State Standards initiative. I do have a Masters degree in Education and Curriculum and have previously been a substitute teacher in public school, but I am not currently associated with any public school system. I am an advocate of education in all its forms— public schools, alternative schools, charter schools, homeschooling, etc. —and will also always be an advocate for school and parental choice.

I began preparing the following document in an effort to better understand the Common Core debate for myself, but over time, this effort has evolved into more than that. My studies made me realize that this issue is very complex, emotionally charged and, frankly, quite misunderstood by people on both sides of the debate. The more I studied and continue to study, the more I feel compelled to share my findings with others.

I urge everyone who reads this document to NOT take my word for it, but to follow the links outlined here, read the articles and original sources I have referenced and even supplement them with more research. Then make your own educated conclusions as you continue to follow the debates and conversations associated with the Common Core State Standards.

### [A Quick Overview](#)

For many years, there have been mandated educational standards on an individual US state level that tell teachers what their students are expected to know by the end of the school year. In the past, states have independently followed

their own state standards, but recent efforts have been made to make them more consistent from state to state.

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematics and “English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” have been adopted by the District of Columbia and all but five US states as of this writing. Alaska, Nebraska, Texas and Virginia have chosen not to participate at all while Minnesota has chosen to adopt only the English standards.

It is becoming more and more well known that there is widespread controversy surrounding these standards. For a good introduction of both sides of the debate, I suggest you begin by reading from the Common Core State Standards Initiative website found at

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

and then read this article from The New York Times found here

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/09/opinion/sunday/the-common-core-whos-minding-the-schools.html?pagewanted=all>

Those against the Common Core standards say that they are a “one size fits all” approach, however this argument could have easily been made for the previous educational state standards that were around for decades. So that argument kind of loses its validity.

Those in favor say that following the standards will help every student “be on the same page,” regardless of what state they live in. That it will help to alleviate the disconnect that so often occurs when a student transfers from a school in one US state to a school in another US state. (Sometimes a student can be academically behind his or her peers when transferring just from one school district to another.)

Those in favor also say that the standards will help students be more adequately prepared for college or further vocational training. You can read more of their reasonings and research here

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_A.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_A.pdf)

I also recommend reading this favorable commentary (followed by some unfavorable comments) found here

<http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/why-conservatives-should-support-the-common-core.html>

Another supporter of the Common Core State Standards is E.D. Hirsch, the founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation and author of the *What Your (P-6<sup>th</sup>) Grader Needs to Know* series as well as the *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*. He is quick to point out that Common Core is a set of educational standards and not a pedagogical curriculum. You can read all of what he has to say here

<http://www.coreknowledge.org/ccss>

(Note that he is referring only to the Common Core English standards and says nothing about the Mathematics standards.)

Those against the Common Core State Standards argue that it is an attempt to bureaucratically control what is taught in public school on a national level and that the standards and corresponding standardized tests just give teachers more red tape to deal with. There are definitely some solid arguments and examples that tend to support these allegations. Some say that the choice by states to adopt the Common Core State Standards are not prerequisites for receiving funding while other say that it is, particularly regarding the Race to the Top educational initiative spearheaded by the United States Department of Education. If this argument peaks your interest, I suggest that you start your research by reading the

document prepared by the Utah State Board of Education found at

<http://www.schools.utah.gov/board/Common-Core/USBCommonCorePPT2013618.aspx>

### The English Standards

Another strong argument against the new Common Core English standards is that the initiative suggests certain books to use in the classroom that do not promote ideas and values that align with some parents' moral principles. I agree that this argument is definitely a legitimate concern.

To be clear, Common Core is a set of standards, not a curriculum. In my opinion, the English standards themselves are pretty benign. You can read them by going to this link

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>

However, concerns arise with some of the suggestions of *how* these standards should be taught (a suggested curriculum) which are found in a supplemental document that can be read here

[http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_B.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf)

But this is where the argument gets fuzzy. For example, many people are upset, and rightly so, over a curriculum suggestion made in an Arkansas school to “Remove two amendments from the ‘outdated’ Bill of Rights.” You can read about that here

<http://gopthedailydose.com/2013/10/08/common-core-assignment-remove-two-amendments-outdated-bill-rights/>

However, this suggestion does not appear anywhere in the 183 pages of the supplemental Common Core document referenced above. As far as I can tell, this assignment did not come from the Common Core State Standards. So where did it come from? There are many educational publishers of curriculum that know where their bread is buttered and have recently published and marketed new curriculum to catch the wave of this new educational trend. The idea could have

come from one of their textbooks or it may have simply been thought up by a teacher with an agenda. Regardless (unless there is something I have missed) I believe I am safe in saying that it does not come from any documents published by the Common Core State Standards initiative.

### [The Math Standards](#)

There is also a concern by many that the Common Core Mathematics Standards, which can be read here

<http://www.corestandards.org/Math>

promote the learning method of what has been called Investigations Math, Everyday Math, or Connected Math.

This strategy, as has been described by proponents, is a “creative, concept based, collaborative learning approach” that encourages problem solving and teamwork. Those who disagree say that this learning strategy demeans the necessity for skill-based learning (like just buckling down and memorizing your multiplication tables) and overemphasizes the need to be able to explain *why*, for example,  $2 \times 2 = 4$ . In other words, they say it is long on philosophy and very short on results.

For a well-informed, “in the trenches” perspective of this aspect of the debate, I suggest reading this article from The Washington Post found at this link

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/a-critical-analysis-of-common-core-math-standards/2012/09/18/1584fd0c-f6b4-11e1-8253-3f495ae70650\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/a-critical-analysis-of-common-core-math-standards/2012/09/18/1584fd0c-f6b4-11e1-8253-3f495ae70650_blog.html)

as well as this math teacher’s observations and concerns found here

<http://dianeravitch.net/2013/01/13/a-math-teacher-on-common-core-standards/comment-page-1/#comments>

I also suggest that you read the written comments below this post— and there are many of them— as they are very informative and insightful and will give you a better understanding of the intricacies of this issue. (Warning: this

is a thought provoking, fascinating, and very deep rabbit hole...)

FYI- the article I just mentioned is a guest post on a blog owned by Diane Ravitch who is adamantly against the required standardized testing that is part of the Common Core initiative. She has been an educator and governmental advisor (for both Democrats and Republicans) for many decades and actually used to be totally on the standardized test bandwagon. While I certainly do not agree with everything she says or stands for, she is definitely a voice that needs to be considered when exploring the Common Core debate.

### [Common Core & Homeschooling](#)

It is my opinion that many of these legitimate concerns about the Common Core English and Mathematics standards should not be nearly as alarming for homeschool parents as for those who have their children in public school. Individual curriculum choice is one of the best perks of homeschooling and is the exact opposite of the cookie cutter, teach to the lowest common denominator approach that can often be followed in public school.

There is still the concern of testing. The Common Core State Standards are meant to be assessed through standardized tests and depending on which state you live in, homeschoolers may have to take these same assessment tests that children in public school will have to take. In many states, testing homeschoolers for basic skills has been the norm for a number of years. But in other states, homeschoolers have not been required to take any tests.

The Common Core State Standards are *not* an “all or nothing” package. Many states have chosen to implement

only certain aspects of the initiative. So homeschool children may now be required to take these tests, or they may not. If you are a homeschool parent and don't already know what the current requirements are for your specific state, I suggest you find out by contacting your state's Department of Education.

As was said previously, many of these concerns about the Common Core standards are rooted in the implementation of *how* they are taught (a suggested curriculum) and not in the standards themselves. Homeschooling parents have infinitely more control over what pieces of literature will or will not be included in their children's studies and can also choose which methods to use to introduce and teach mathematics. At least for right now, depending on the pending testing issue, just as each individual state has the freedom to implement the Common Core State Standards as it sees fit, homeschooling parents also have the freedom to refer to the standards as guides as they create a homeschool curriculum to fit their children's individual needs.

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