Frequently Asked Questions: Common Core Overview

What are the Common Core State Standards?
The Common Core State Standards, or “Common Core,” are academic learning goals for grades K-12 in math and English language arts. The Common Core, which replaces Washington’s learning standards in math, reading, communication and writing, sets goals or standards that focus on deeper understanding of basic subjects in order to better prepare students for success in college, work, and life.

What's the difference between the Common Core standards and curriculum?
Common Core is a set of student learning standards that communicate shared goals and expectations for the knowledge and skills students should acquire at every grade level. Learning standards are different from curriculum or lesson plans. While the Common Core sets high expectations for what students should know, it does not set a lesson plan or tell teachers how to teach.

A curriculum is made up of teaching and learning materials that teachers use to help construct their day-to-day lesson plans. With the Common Core, teachers will still create lesson plans and tailor instruction to meet the needs of individual students in their classrooms.

Who developed the Common Core?
The Common Core was created by states, for states. Hundreds of teachers, education researchers, mathematicians, and other experts across the country collaborated in developing the Common Core, with state governors and state schools chiefs both in leading roles since 2009.

How will the Common Core improve the quality of our education?

1. Master the material. The Common Core standards are designed to ensure real understanding. The materials go deeper into fewer topics, so kids master the material instead of just memorizing. Learning is more hands-on with a focus on what students will use in real life.

2. Building blocks for critical thinking. The Common Core standards emphasize learning fundamentals so students truly understand basic concepts and can use them as the building blocks for critical thinking.

3. Teacher collaboration. Teachers across the nation will be able to collaborate and learn from each other because other states are using the same high standards.

4. Consistent, high expectations for all students. Before Common Core, what counted as grade-level work in one state might be less than average in another. Common Core provides a clear and consistent set of learning standards and expectations so we can truly know what students are learning.

Will my local schools and teachers still have control over curriculum and other local decisions?
Yes, the Common Core is a set of standards that provides a framework for what students should know at each grade level. How those standards are taught is up to Washington’s 295 school districts and more than 2,000 individual schools. Teachers in each school and district will have the flexibility and control to set the curriculum that best meets the needs of their students.
How does the Common Core support a stronger economy?
1. **We live in a global economy and a mobile society.** For example, military families move frequently between states, technology professionals are extremely mobile, and Washington competes not just with other states but with other nations. With the Common Core, we can be sure that our students are learning the skills they need to be prepared for the global economy.

2. **Building the critical skills students need in the job market.** Right now, Washington has 25,000 unfilled jobs for highly skilled workers — and that number is projected to grow to 50,000 by 2017. Our state has jobs, but lacks qualified applicants. Common Core focuses on real-world skills that students need to get a job and be competitive in the workplace.

What is the timeline for using the Common Core in Washington schools?
The state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has been working together with schools, districts and teachers on a transition plan — including implementation guides, local and regional supports, teacher training and resources — since 2011. The Common Core standards will be fully implemented in Washington schools in the 2013-14 school year. The following year, students will take new tests in math and English language arts that are aligned to the Common Core standards and are designed to be a better measure of what students know and understand.

Here’s the timeline:

- **2010**
  - OSPI works with stakeholders to review existing learning standards and conduct a cost-benefit analysis of adopting the Common Core.

- **July 2011**
  - The Common Core State Standards for English language arts and math are officially adopted by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, replacing Washington’s previous learning standards in reading, writing, communication and math.

- **2013-2014**
  - Teachers in every school district fully transition to the Common Core standards, offering new learning opportunities for every student in math and English language arts. New exams are field tested for math and English language arts.

- **2014-15**
  - The Common Core standards are fully implemented and new exams in math and English language arts are rolled out to better measure student knowledge and establish a baseline for the future.

- **Ongoing**
  - OSPI partners with state and regional professional learning partners to provide resources and learning opportunities to teachers, districts and school administrators to begin implementation.

Do parents and teachers support the Common Core?
Yes, 80% of Washington parents, teachers and people like you support the Common Core (January 2013 poll by Strategies 360 for Washington STEM). 70% of Washington teachers and voters agree that common learning standards across the nation in math and English will improve student learning and achievement (January 2013 poll by DHM Research for Excellent Schools Now).

Can I talk to my child’s teacher about Common Core?
Yes, talking to your child’s teacher is the best way to stay involved in their education. Talk to the teacher, learn about your child’s learning expectations, and help create a learning plan for them to succeed. Teachers in Washington support the Common Core, are receiving on-going training and are working very hard to implement the more rigorous standards.