

Common Core State Standards:

Essential Information for School Counselors



AMERICAN COUNSELING
ASSOCIATION

— Top Ten Things to Know —

1. How did Common Core come about?

As of today, forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted the Common Core State Standards. These rigorous standards were developed by state leaders through the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Other groups such as parents, teachers, administrators, researchers, Achieve, ACT, and the College Board also participated in the creation of the standards. School counselor representation has not been included in the process.

2. What is it? (And what is it not?)

The Common Core State Standards have become a national movement, setting high quality academic expectations in English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Each standard has been created with keeping students on track for success in college and career in mind. They define what skills and knowledge every student should have at the end of each grade. These state-driven standards are said to be research and evidence-based and internationally benchmarked. Beginning in 2014, assessments that are aligned with the Common Core standards should be integrated into participating schools. These assessments will determine if students are college and career ready, as defined by these rigorous standards. Many educators caution that scores on these assessments will initially be lower than current assessments, because of the material being tested. (This was the case in a pilot study in Kentucky.)

This is not policy enacted by Congress or run by the Department of Education. The standards are also not specific curriculum for teachers to follow. They are designed to allow flexibility for how the standards are taught and enable teachers to embrace diversification in their planning.

3. Definition of College and Career Readiness and the Role of the School Counselor

The Career Readiness Partnership Council has recognized that college readiness is only part of the issue; what is needed is a comprehensive strategy that links education with workforce preparation and includes all aspects of preparation and support. The Council defines a career ready person as someone who “effectively navigates pathways that connect education and

employment to achieve a fulfilling, financially-secure and successful career (p.2).” The emphasis is on life-long learning; adaptability to change; knowledge, skills, and career dispositions. The school counseling program drives college-and-career readiness through programs that address areas such as social and interpersonal skills, organizational skills, and problem solving skills.

To help students become career-ready, schools must begin in elementary school and coordinate and collaborate throughout all grades to create opportunities for all students to gain the knowledge and skills needed for their futures. Counselors understand that to accomplish these goals they must address the academic barriers through a focus on social and emotional learning as part of their unique function in the schools.

4. What a Professional School Counselor Needs to Know.

Professional school counselors need to become familiar with the Common Core standards, its implementation in their district and school, and how student’s achievement will be measured under Common Core. Counselors must also understand how their comprehensive, development counseling program integrates with Common Core, that is how the components of their program support student outcomes and help students become college-and-career-ready. Lastly, they must understand Common Core components and implementation so that they may facilitate the inclusion of all students as appropriate and advocate for those who might be excluded from activities needed for their success.

Common Core State Standards Mission Statement:

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.

(CoreStandards.org)

For counselors the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will bring increased focus to their career development and college awareness activities. This includes becoming knowledgeable about the world of work, postsecondary opportunities, and financial aid and college admissions. They will also need to design programs that ensure all students have access to information about these areas and the support they need to become successful.

5. Why Professional School Counselors are critical to discussions about Common Core.

Leading initiatives and removing barriers surrounding college and career access, Professional School Counselors are typically the gate keepers of college and career pathways. Common Core State Standards are designed to determine the degree to which students are on-track or off-track for college and career readiness. As Common Core is integrated into standard testing practices within schools, it's likely its outcomes will drive interventions meant to safeguard on-track performance, and prevent and intervene in off-track performance. Student outcomes on the Common Core State Standards will most likely become a part of early warning systems identifying student performance gaps; therefore, school counselors should be prepared to discuss how Common Core data could drive discussions around scheduling and student placement, college and career selection (entrance exams), as well as what types of remedial and student support services will effectively intervene, getting students back 'on track'. As a student advocate and leader of college and career readiness within the school community, it's imperative that school counselors are familiar with the language, theories, and data surrounding Common Core Standards, allowing them to effectively consult, counsel, and collaborate with students, parents, and school stakeholders, removing barriers to ALL students college and career success.

6. How will these standards impact your role?

The Common Core standards will impact the roles of the professional school counselor in a number of ways. Counselors, working in schools at all levels:


may need to adjust the content of classroom guidance and career development activities to align with the outcomes for their school and grade. They may also need to increase their focus on career development initiatives if they are not already a significant component of their program;

must advocate to ensure that all students are served under college-and-career ready initiatives, particularly those who have traditionally been underserved by college-readiness programs; and


help students and parents understand the changes effected by the Common Core Standards and the implications for students.

7. What does Common Core means for students?

Common Core State Standards provide a much desired comprehensive vision of what it means to be college and career ready. A national yardstick, students will be able to measure their readiness against national standards for entry into college and career pathways. While not all students will perform adequately, it's important that students do not internalize their performance as a final determination of their ability; rather assessment outcomes should act as a tool to initiate conversations in which students can comprehend their performance level, deficit areas, and explore interventions and support services that will bridge their achievement gaps. School counselors' holistic perspective of education, allows them to frame these discussions with encouragement, motivating students, parents, and school stakeholders to implement effective interventions resulting in higher student achievement levels and outcomes, fostering a college and career going culture.



“Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, and education and career goals. Through the application of counseling theories and techniques in context, school counselors accomplish these goals by fostering educational and social equity, access, and success. The professional school counselor serves as a leader and an assertive advocate for students, consultant to educators, families and the community and collaborator and team member with teachers, administrators and other school personnel to help each student succeed.”



8. What do parents need to know about Common Core?

A significant shift in how we measure student achievement, it's important that parents understand what the Common Core measures, how the indicators are determined, and in what ways the assessment outcomes will impact their students' educational trajectory. The influence assessment outcomes will have on students' educational experience may vary from school to school, and perhaps from school system to school system; nonetheless it's imperative that parents are educated on the concepts and implications Common Core Assessment could have on their students' education, as they are partners in our work of advocating for student success. We highly recommend collaborating with your administration to establish effective ways in which you will educate parents about the Common Core State Standards and what it means to their students education.

9. How Common Core will impact your collaboration with your school administration?

As with most systemic initiatives, school counselors will need to collaborate with administration to successfully implement Common Core State Standards in ways that will drive student performance outcomes. As schools implement programs and develop systems of support, school counselors will be a critical voice at the table, safeguarding students' personal / social wellbeing, and advocating for systems that support and promote ALL students. School counselors will identify student performance barriers and equity gaps by assessing disaggregated testing data and making recommendations to their school leadership team(s) on how to effectively infuse interventions to fill performance gaps. School Counselors also play a significant role in managing school-wide policies that stem from student performance outcomes (i.e. scheduling and placement, remedial supports, tutoring, etc.), and should work to ensure they're a part of their schools leadership team and discussions. Administrators, teachers, parents, and students will seek their advisement and consult on this topic; therefore it's important that they are well versed in Common Core subject matter, and prepared to implement and manage effective interventions and support systems in comprehensive and data driven ways. Common Core data will most likely drive School Counseling Program Plans; another collaborative tool counselors use with principals to align goals and outcomes.

10. Where can I find more information on Common Core State Standards?

Common Core State Standards Webpage: www.CoreStandards.org

Common Core Works: www.CommonCoreWorks.org

National Governors Association's Center for Best Practices: <http://www.nga.org/cms/home/nga-center-for-best-practices/center-issues/page-edu-issues/col2-content/main-content-list/common-core-state-standards.html>

The following website for CASEL addresses implementing Social Emotional Learning standards and practices into the school: <http://casel.org/in-schools/implementation/implementation-guidance/>

The following website for the Center for Mental Health in the Schools, housed at the University of California Los Angeles, includes information specific to the integration of specialized support services in Common Core: <http://www.smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/commoncore.pdf>

The Career Readiness Partnership Council has created a definition of what it means to be career ready. This information can be found at <http://www.careerreadynow.org/>

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) provides Common Core State Standards information for families and educators of Latino students. Handouts are in English and Spanish. Two great resources from this organization are 1) an implementation guide for educators called Raising the Bar: Implementing Common Core State Standards for Latino Student Success and 2) a report called Access to Common Standards for All: An Advocacy Tool Kit for Supporting Success. These can be found at www.nclr.org

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