

A detailed map of Louisiana showing its parishes, major cities, and the Mississippi River. The map is overlaid with a semi-transparent yellow box containing the title text.

Overview of Common Core State Standards



Performance Audit Services Issue Brief

September 22, 2014

What's Inside

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- 4 • Introduction
- 5 • How Common Core Was Developed
- 8 • Description of Common Core Standards
- 10 • Common Core Aligned Tests
- 12 • Proponents and Opponents of Common Core
- 13 • Common Core in Other States
- 14 • Common Core in Louisiana
- 19 • Appendix A
- 21 • Appendix B
- 24 • Appendix C
- 28 • Appendix D

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LOUISIANA LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR
DARYL G. PURPERA, CPA, CFE

September 22, 2014

The Honorable John A. Alario, Jr.,
President of the Senate
The Honorable Charles E. "Chuck" Kleckley,
Speaker of the House of Representatives

Dear Senator Alario and Representative Kleckley:

This issue brief is the first in a series of new reports designed to provide non-partisan, detailed information on key issues confronting Louisiana.

This issue brief provides information on Common Core. The purpose of this brief is to explain how Common Core started, provide examples of the standards, explain the primary arguments for and against implementation of the standards, and describe what Louisiana and other states are doing related to Common Core.

Sincerely,

Daryl G. Purpera, CPA, CFE
Legislative Auditor

DGP/ch

COMMON CORE 2014

Introduction

The brief includes the following topics:

How Common Core Was Developed
(pages 5-7)

•
Description and Examples of
Common Core Standards
(pages 8-10)

•
Common Core Aligned Tests
(pages 10-11)

•
Proponents and Opponents of
Common Core
(page 12)

•
Common Core in Other States
(pages 13-14)

•
Common Core in Louisiana
(pages 14-15)

The **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** are a set of standards developed through an initiative coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. These standards detail what skills students should learn from kindergarten through 12th grade and specifically focus on what students should know in mathematics and English language arts.

The standards tell education authorities, teachers, parents, and the general public what skills students should acquire as they move from grade to grade but do not dictate how teachers should teach those skills.

Standards are not the same thing as curricula, textbooks, lesson plans, or classroom activities and assignments. Those are the tools by which teachers teach and students learn; the choice of which materials teachers use continues to be a state and local decision.



The purpose of this issue brief is to provide information on Common Core. Although much has been written and debated about the standards in the past year, surveys continue to show that roughly half of Americans know either little or nothing at all about the issue. That includes Louisianans, as evidenced by the results of the spring 2014 Louisiana Survey, conducted by the LSU Public Policy Research Lab, which found that nearly one out of two Louisiana residents had not heard of Common Core.

How Common Core was Developed

The effort to create education standards is not new. Education advocates have tried over several decades to develop an agreed-upon set of standards, including during the administrations of presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. Those efforts faltered for a variety of reasons, but primarily because state and local leaders wanted to retain control over education in their individual states, and consensus was hard to achieve.¹

In 2001, another attempt to create common standards came when President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) into law. NCLB was designed to increase state accountability for student progress and allowed states to set their own proficiency standards. The result was that some states created strong standards, while others were not as rigorous. The discrepancy became apparent when students across the country took the National Assessment



of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests.² The tests showed not only that some states consistently outperformed others but also that the NAEP

results did not match the state assessment results being provided by some states. In other words, some states showed that their students were making progress each year, but their NAEP results indicated they were not.³

In addition, results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, which measure student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science among 65 countries, showed that U.S. students were well behind their international counterparts. The PISA tests have been given every three years since 2000. Exhibit 1 shows U.S. scores for the mathematics assessment since 2006 and where the U.S. ranks among other countries. U.S. students have consistently finished in the middle of the group of countries taking the tests and almost always just at or below the benchmark score. Appendix A provides the U.S. assessment scores for reading and science and how they compare to other countries.⁴

Exhibit 1 PISA - Mathematics Assessment Rank				
Rank	Country	2012	2009	2006
1	Shanghai China	613	600	n/a
2	Singapore	573	562	n/a
3	Hong Kong-China	561	555	547
4	Chinese Taipei	560	543	549
5	Republic of Korea	554	546	547
6	Macao-China	538	525	525
7	Japan	536	529	523
8	Liechtenstein	535	536	525
9	Switzerland	531	534	530
10	Netherlands	523	526	531
11	Estonia	521	512	515
12	Finland	519	541	548
13	Canada	518	527	527
14	Poland	518	495	495
15	Belgium	515	515	520
16	Germany	514	513	504
17	Vietnam	511	n/a	n/a
18	Austria	506	496	505
19	Australia	504	514	520
20	Ireland	501	487	501
36	United States	481	487	474

Note: Countries ranked in order based on 2012 results. An entry of n/a means students in that country either did not take the test or not enough took the test to make the results relevant.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Education leaders were also troubled by the fact that college enrollment rates among U.S. students were stagnant, while remediation rates for such subjects as algebra were high. At the same time, business and industry leaders expressed growing concern that students were not learning the skills they needed to succeed in the workplace.⁵

In the spring of 2009, the governors and state superintendents of education from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia went to work to develop a set of common, rigorous, internationally benchmarked educational standards. It was an effort that initially was greeted with overwhelming support from the states. By the summer of 2009, all but two states, Texas and Alaska, had signed an agreement to participate in the development of the Common Core standards.⁶

The standards were developed under the auspices of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The process involved consulting existing state standards, researching college and career readiness, and exploring international education systems.⁷ Specifically, those developing the standards looked at the following:

- Scholarly research
- Surveys of what skills students need to know to enter college or workforce training programs
- Assessment data that identified college- and career-ready performance
- Comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations⁸



Public comment on the proposed standards was solicited twice—in September 2009 and in March 2010.⁹ In addition to members of the public, external and state feedback teams were also asked to comment on the proposed standards.¹⁰ The individuals on those teams included K-12 teachers, college and university faculty, state curriculum and assessment experts, researchers, and representatives from the American Council on Education, the American Federation of Teachers, the Campaign for High School Equity, the Conference Board of the Mathematical Sciences, the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Education Association. Other groups that reviewed the proposed standards included the College Board, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the National Parent Teacher Association, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the Council of Administrators of Special Education, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.¹¹

In Louisiana, the proposed standards were reviewed by the state Department of Education's content staff and representatives from the following 10 state education organizations:

- Louisiana School Boards Association
- Louisiana Association of Educators
- Louisiana Federation of Teachers
- Associated Professional Educators of Louisiana

- Louisiana Association of Principals
- District superintendents
- Louisiana Council of Teachers of English
- Louisiana Association of Teachers of Mathematics
- English Standards Review Committee
- Math Standards Review Committee¹²

The final report on the standards was released in June 2010 after nearly 10,000 individuals had provided input. Most of the 46 states that eventually adopted the standards did so between 2010 and 2012. States had three options in adopting the standards. They could adopt the standards verbatim; they could adopt the standards and create some additional ones specific to their state; or they could develop their own common standards in conjunction with other states. Or they could choose not to adopt the standards at all. Four states picked that option – Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia.¹³

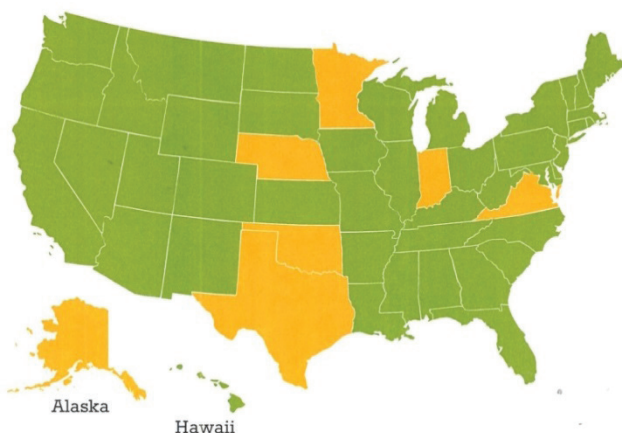


Exhibit 2
States’ Adoption of Common Core

Source: Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org

In Louisiana, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) officially adopted the Common Core State Standards in July 2010. While the standards went into effect immediately, school districts were not required to fully implement them until 2012-2013. Assessments aligned to the standards were used in 2012-2013 and 2013-2014, although they did not measure the full scope of what students were learning. The assessments expected to be used in spring 2015 will test the full scope of the standards, as required by state law.¹⁴

Exhibit 2 shows the states that have adopted Common Core standards (in green) and the states that either did not adopt the standards or officially repealed their adoption (in gold), as of August 1, 2014. (Minnesota is included among the gold states because it only adopted the English language arts standards.)

Description and Examples of the Standards

The Common Core standards comprise two components—broad anchor standards and more specific grade-level standards. The anchor standards provide the framework for the grade-specific standards. Appendix B provides a list of all anchor standards. Taken together, both sets of standards establish a road map for what skills students should master by the end of each grade. The standards are designed as a stair-step progression.¹⁵ That is, the knowledge and skills taught in each grade build on the foundation laid in the previous grade. The standards focus on mathematics, English language arts, and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.¹⁶ In grades K-8, specific standards exist for each grade. For grades 9-12, the standards are grouped into bands for grades 9-10 and 11-12.¹⁷

Mathematics

Under the Common Core mathematics standards, teachers cover fewer topics in greater depth with their students than in the past. For instance, in kindergarten through second grade, students focus on mathematical concepts, skills, and problem solving related to addition and subtraction, while in grades 3-5, the emphasis is on the concepts, skills, and problem solving related to multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions.¹⁸

In middle school, students progress to work on ratios and proportional relationships, focusing on early algebraic expressions and equations, and rational numbers before tackling algebra and linear functions. Ideally, the standards will help teachers present these mathematical concepts in a more organized way and encourage them to give their students time to practice what they have learned using real-world problems.¹⁹ Exhibit 3 shows how the change would work for middle school students in mathematics.

Exhibit 3 Example of Same Math Question Before and After Common Core	
Previous Math Question	Common Core Math Question
A bird flew 20 miles in 100 minutes at constant speed. At that speed, how long would it take the bird to fly 6 miles?	A bird flew 20 miles in 100 minutes at constant speed. At that speed: (a) how long would it take the bird to fly 6 miles? (b) How far would the bird fly in 15 minutes? (c) How fast is the bird flying in miles per hour? (d) What is the bird's pace in minutes per mile?
<i>This question requires students to perform one calculation, using a formula.</i>	<i>This question requires students to perform a series of calculations and reasoning. It is designed to measure whether students understand why the formula works.</i>
Source: The Foundation for Excellence in Education; http://excelined.org/common-core-toolkit/old-standards-v-common-core-a-side-by-side-comparison-of-math-expectations/	

The primary shifts in the mathematics standards include a focus on fewer topics in greater depth, helping students build on their knowledge from grade to grade, and working with them to demonstrate their understanding of specific concepts by using math in everyday situations.²⁰ Appendix C provides more detail on the key shifts in mathematics.

English Language Arts

The Common Core standards in English language arts are divided into four major categories: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. The reading category is divided further into three sub-categories: literature, informational text, and foundational skills. The biggest change in how reading is taught is the emphasis on nonfiction texts. The standards push students to read both literature and nonfiction works throughout their elementary and secondary education career, with the percentage of nonfiction increasing from 50 percent in elementary and middle school to 70 percent in high school. The goal is for students to become familiar with the type of reading they eventually will need to do in college and/or the workplace. In addition, the standards call for students to answer questions about what they read by referring back to the text for evidence to back up their responses. The goal is to help students develop their critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills.²¹

The primary shifts in English language arts call for students to regularly practice reading complex texts that are appropriate for their grade level, use evidence from the texts in their reading, writing, and speaking assignments, and increase their knowledge of various content areas through relevant nonfiction works.²² Appendix C provides more details on the key shifts in English language arts. Exhibit 4 shows an example of how the standards would work related to English language arts for a second- to third-grade level.

Exhibit 4 Example of English Language Arts Before and After Common Core

In the area of literature—or fiction—teachers frequently read aloud to young students and discuss the story with the children to see if they have grasped the most important information. Under Common Core, the nature of the discussion will change. For example, the book “Charlotte’s Web” is a common one for children to tackle. The story focuses on a little girl named Fern, her piglet Wilbur, and Wilbur’s friend Charlotte, who is a spider that lives in the barn with Wilbur. Below are some questions teachers might discuss with their students.

Before Common Core	With Common Core
<p><i>Students answer:</i></p> <p>Who is telling the story in “Charlotte’s Web”?</p> <p>How does Wilbur feel toward Charlotte at the end of the story?</p> <p>How do you know?</p>	<p><i>Students discuss:</i></p> <p>What is your point of view about Wilbur?</p> <p>How is it different from Fern’s point of view about Wilbur?</p> <p>How is it different from the narrator’s point of view?</p>
<p><i>The old expectation requires students to state that the narrator is telling the story and give one example to show that Wilbur loves Charlotte.</i></p> <p><i>To be successful in this task, students only have to give an example that Wilbur loves Charlotte. They don’t have to understand why Wilbur loves Charlotte. This example could be as simple as Wilbur telling Charlotte that he loves her.</i></p>	<p><i>The new expectation requires students to understand and explain that characters see the world differently. The students learn about Wilbur and Charlotte and Fern from the narrator, but they also learn about each character by what they say to each other and by how they act in certain situations.</i></p> <p><i>To be successful in this task, students have to have listened to the teacher and taken part in the classroom discussion after each chapter has been read. They have to think about why Fern sees Wilbur in a different way than the narrator does and explain that.</i></p>
<p>Source: The Foundation for Excellence in Education; http://excelined.org/common-core-toolkit/old-standards-v-common-core-a-side-by-side-comparison-of-english-language-arts-2/</p>	

Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

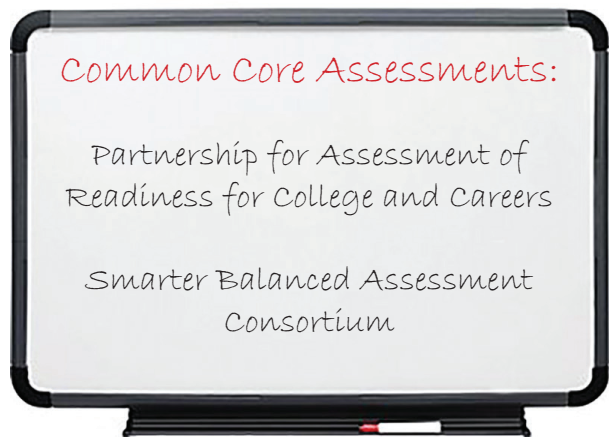
Beginning in grade 6, the standards call for teachers to help students expand their analytical reading and writing skills by applying them to the areas of history/social studies, science, and other technical subjects. To accomplish that, teachers are being asked to incorporate subject specific reading and writing assignments into their classes. However, the literacy standards are meant to supplement the basic content of these subject areas, not replace it.²³

Among the reasons for the additional focus on literacy are complaints from higher education leaders that students are ill-prepared to handle the type of academic reading and analysis necessary to succeed in college. Business and industry leaders also have pointed out the necessity for employees to be able to read and understand the technical writings unique to each field.²⁴

Common Core Aligned Tests

With the implementation of Common Core, state educators also needed new assessments to measure whether students are meeting the standards. Two state-run consortia were established to develop such tests—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—and the federal government provided them with a total of \$330 million through Race to the Top funds to do the work.²⁵

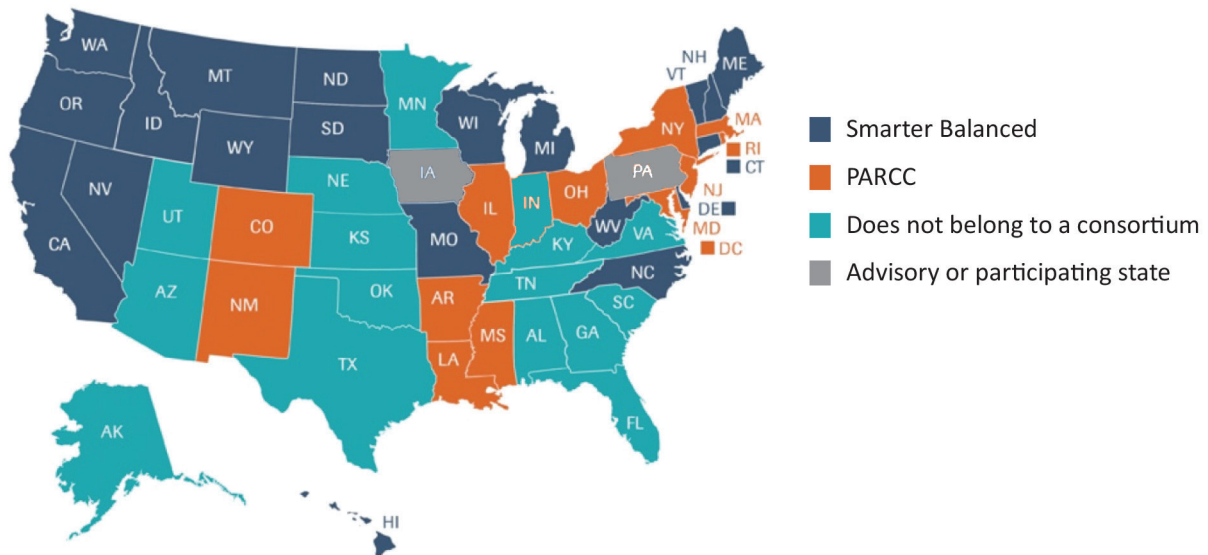
The number of states in the consortia has fluctuated. Some states joined both consortia; some joined a single consortium, left it, and then joined the other one; other states have only belonged to one consortium; and



four states never joined either one. Several states also have left both consortia. As of September 1, 2014, 20 states are members of Smarter Balanced (shown in dark blue); 12 states plus the District of Columbia belong to PARCC (shown in orange); and two states are listed as “participating” or “advisory states” (shown in gray). Advisory states are defined as having an interest in the activities of the consortia but not necessarily using the assessments. In fact, officials in both Pennsylvania and Iowa have said they are withdrawing their states from the consortia and using their own assessments. Those states in teal do not belong to either consortium.²⁶

Exhibit 3 PARCC, Smarter Balanced Membership (as of September 1, 2014)

Sources: Education Week, PARCC, and Smarter Balanced websites and individual state websites



Work on the assessments has been ongoing since 2010-2011. The hope is that the new tests will “yield timely data to support and inform instruction, provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure achievement against standards that reflect the skills and knowledge required for success in college and the workforce.”²⁷ PARCC and Smarter Balanced both field-tested their assessments in the spring of 2014, and the goal is for the tests to be ready for full implementation in the 2014-2015 school year. However, the assessments have proved to be a point of contention for opponents of Common Core, and legislation is pending in a few states that would require them to leave whichever testing consortium they belong to and develop their own tests, as Utah has done.

In addition to PARCC and Smarter Balanced, other groups are developing assessments aligned with the Common Core standards, and a handful of states have decided to use those tests instead. For instance, Alabama and Oklahoma have adopted the ACT Aspire assessments. Appendix D provides more information on what assessments states plan to use.

Proponents and Opponents of Common Core

Both proponents and opponents make a variety of arguments to support their positions. Proponents argue that Common Core is needed because U.S. students continue to fall behind their international peers at a time when the world is growing increasingly competitive. If the United States is to maintain its ability to compete, they say, future generations need a better, more rigorous education than they have received in the past.

Closer to home, business and higher education leaders say students are not being taught the college- and career-readiness skills they need to succeed in the 21st-century economy. Specifically, they lack necessary critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills.

Finally, proponents of Common Core say, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests have showed clearly the discrepancies in the abilities of the states to educate their children. They believe a set of common standards would help ensure that students are being taught to the same degree of rigor.²⁸

Opposition to the Common Core State Standards and to the standardized assessments being developed to test students' knowledge has become increasingly vocal, and in many states, efforts are underway to persuade officials to withdraw from Common Core and/or from the two consortia developing assessment tests. So far, only Indiana and Oklahoma have officially repealed their adoption of the Common Core standards. They have also withdrawn from participation in PARCC, and as mentioned above, several other states have withdrawn from one of the two consortia developing the common assessments.²⁸

The opponents generally fall into two camps. One group objects to what it sees as federal overreach into an area that historically has been the purview of the states. Some also fear that the federal government's aim is to take away local (i.e., parental) control, and they object to the demands the new standards place on their children.

More specifically, many opponents do not believe that Common Core was a state-led initiative or that the states that have adopted the Common Core standards did so voluntarily. They also do not believe that the standards are rigorous or internationally benchmarked or that the states will continue to control curriculum. Finally, they believe it already is possible to compare student achievement across states through the NAEP, ACT, and SAT assessments.²⁹

Other opponents say the implementation of the Common Core standards has been poorly thought out and teachers, schools, and districts have not received enough time and resources to properly prepare for this fundamental shift in education. Still others believe that many of the standards are not age-appropriate for the grades they are attached to and that the continued emphasis on testing will hurt rather than help students.³⁰



Implementation in Other States

Forty-six states initially adopted the Common Core State Standards, although Minnesota decided to only implement the English language arts standards. Four states—Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia—declined to adopt the standards. Since then, Indiana and Oklahoma legislators have voted to repeal Common Core. South Carolina, North Carolina, and Missouri lawmakers also have voted to repeal Common Core, but the standards will remain in effect in these states at least for the 2014-2015 school year while committees work to develop new state-specific standards.

In some states—such as Florida and Pennsylvania—officials made a few changes to the standards to put their state’s imprint on them. In other states, officials have simply renamed the standards to give them a more local feel. For instance, Idaho calls the standards the Idaho Core Standards, while Washington refers to them as the Washington State Learning Standards, and Tennessee has named them TNCore. (Appendix D provides a side-by-side comparison of all the states).

Across the country, progress in implementing the standards has been uneven. Generally, the earlier a state adopted the standards and the stronger its transition plan was, the further along it is. Among the hindrances have been the lack of curricula, textbooks, instructional materials, and assessments aligned with the standards; the lack of financial resources to pay for the new materials; and the lack of time to provide teachers with the necessary professional development.

Gradually, however, state education authorities and local districts have revamped their curricula, while teachers have rewritten their lesson plans and gathered new books and instructional materials. Education publishing companies also have caught up with the changes, and are offering more resources that match the standards. Further, the two major consortia working to develop assessments aligned with the Common Core—the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—are nearly finished with their work. The assessments are expected to be available in time for spring 2015.

States have taken a variety of approaches in their implementation of the standards. Kentucky was the first state to adopt the Common Core standards and to start using fully aligned assessment tests. School districts had one year to implement the mathematics and English language arts standards (2010-2011), and the matching assessments were rolled out in 2012. The Kentucky Department of Education provided training to local school district leaders and set up a group of interlocking Leadership Networks. The networks focus on district and school leaders, content-specific groups of teachers, higher education, and early learning. In addition, the department developed the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System Web portal to host online, on-demand resources and materials for educators.³¹

New York was another early adopter of the Common Core standards. In 2009, the New York State Education Department and the New York State Board of Regents established the Regents Reform Agenda to improve college and career readiness for all of the state’s students. Part of the agenda called for the adoption of the Common Core standards, which officials did in 2010. The state implemented the Common Core standards in kindergarten through grade 8 in 2012-2013 and in grades 9-12 in 2013-2014. In addition, the state developed pre-kindergarten standards, which went into effect in 2012-2013. New York has been working on developing its own assessment tests for grades 3-8, and is working on aligning its Regents exams with the high school standards. To help districts make the transition, the education department created Network Teams of

educators and experts to provide professional development and curriculum planning. The state also developed the EngageNY website to provide online help and resources for educators and helped establish the Tri-State Rubrics, which give teachers a way to see if their instructional plans align with the standards.³²

Closer to Louisiana, Mississippi adopted the Common Core in 2010 and began phasing it in with the kindergarten through grade 2 standards in 2011-2012. Grades 3-8 were added in 2012-2013, and full implementation took effect in 2013-2014. Mississippi does not currently have any assessments aligned with the standards, but officials plan to use the PARCC tests when they are ready. The state Department of Education has focused on training and development at the local level to help teachers shift to the new standards through a series of “boot camps” for elementary and secondary school teachers, the Common Core SharePoint website, and the PARCC Educator Leader Cadre who serve as ambassadors for the standards and assessments in their communities.³³

Common Core in Louisiana

As noted previously, Louisiana’s state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) voted in July 2010 to adopt the Common Core. The state Department of Education implemented the standards immediately and staggered the timeframe for districts to begin using the full standards in their classrooms – 2012-2013 for kindergarten through grade 2 and 2013-2014 for grades 3-12.

At the moment, Louisiana is using the different tests that comprise its Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) to measure student progress in grades 3-8 and in high school. State education officials say the tests are aligned with the Common Core standards, but they do not measure the full scope of the standards. They plan to implement the assessments developed by PARCC for grades 3-8 in spring 2015 and to continue using end-of-course tests and the ACT for high school students.

The department has set up district implementation teams to help local districts make the transition to Common Core. Department officials work with the teams to help them establish priorities, discuss implementation plans, review data, and provide other support. The department also has created the Teacher Leader Cadre, whose members provide information and training for their colleagues on the standards, assessments, and teacher and leader evaluation issues. In addition, the department has set up a Teacher Support Toolbox Web portal to offer educators more professional development opportunities, as well as instructional materials and resources.

Despite initial enthusiasm for Common Core, opposition to implementation of the standards and the common assessment tests remains. Several bills were introduced in the 2014 Regular Session to repeal the standards in Louisiana or to prohibit the use of the assessments developed by PARCC, but the measures failed to pass.

Following the legislative session, the governor issued two executive orders. One suspended the changes to Bulletin 118 that allowed the state Department of Education to go forward with its plans for assessments for the 2014-2015 school year; the other ordered the department to reopen the assessment procurement process (Bulletin 118 is the department's official guide to testing programs, policies, and procedures). Efforts by the superintendent of education, BESE members, and the governor to reach a compromise were unsuccessful, and the dispute ended up in the courts with a series of lawsuits filed by supporters and opponents.

On July 21, 17 legislators filed a lawsuit against BESE and the superintendent of education, alleging they failed to follow the state's Administrative Procedures Act in putting the Common Core standards into effect and asking that use of the standards be suspended immediately. A group consisting of parents, teachers, and representatives of a charter school operator who support Common Core then filed a lawsuit against the governor on July 22, alleging he overstepped his authority with the executive orders. BESE members voted 6-4 on July 29 to join the parents' lawsuit, while the governor filed his own lawsuit on the same day seeking to end the memorandum of understanding he signed in 2010 under which Louisiana joined PARCC.

On August 19, a judge ruled against the Jindal administration in the suit brought by BESE, parents, teachers, and the charter school operator, thereby allowing the Department of Education to go forward with its testing plans for the 2014-2015 school year. That decision followed one by a different judge on August 15, who denied legislators' request to immediately suspend the use of the Common Core standards. Attorneys for the Jindal administration have said they plan to appeal the August 19 decision.

On August 27, the governor filed suit in federal court alleging that the federal government coerced the states into adopting the Common Core standards and consortia assessments through its requirements for the Race to the Top grant program. A hearing has not been set yet.

Common Core Timeline for Louisiana

May 2010—BESE indicates intention to adopt Common Core

June 8, 2010—Governor signs MOU joining PARCC

July 2010—BESE officially adopts Common Core

2010-2014—BESE, LDOE, and local school districts conduct planning, transition and implementation of Common Core

2014 Legislative Session—Bills to prohibit use of PARCC tests and repeal Common Core fail to pass

June 18, 2014—Governor suspends department's testing plans and orders assessment procurement process re-opened

July 21, 2014—17 legislators sue BESE, superintendent, saying they violated state law in adopting Common Core

July 22, 2014—Common Core supporters sue the governor, saying he overstepped his authority in suspending assessment plans

July 29, 2014—BESE votes to join supporters' lawsuit

July 29, 2014—Governor files suit seeking to void the PARCC memorandum of understanding

August 15, 2014—Judge denies legislators' request to suspend use of standards

August 19, 2014—Judge lifts suspension of testing contracts

August 27, 2014—Governor files suit against the federal government

Source: Timeline put together by LLA staff based on news accounts and court filings

Conclusion

Four years after the Common Core State Standards were officially released:

- Forty-one of the 46 states that initially adopted them continue to use them to guide instruction in whole or in part.
- Two states have officially repealed them.
- Three states are in the process of developing their own standards to replace them.
- Four states never adopted them in the first place.

Implementation of the standards has been an ongoing challenge as states, districts, and individual schools have worked to develop curricula and put together textbook lists, instructional materials, lesson plans, and professional development training to help them meet the standards. Education publishing companies have been working in that time as well to develop materials aligned with the standards, and the two major testing consortia – PARCC and Smarter Balanced – are on schedule to have their assessments ready by spring 2015.

On the political front, both proponents and opponents of Common Core continue to seek out their elected officials in hopes of either staying the course or repealing the standards. For instance, numerous pieces of anti-Common Core legislation were proposed across the country in the 2014 set of legislative sessions, but most failed to pass.

At the same time, national surveys have found that the majority of Americans still do not know much about Common Core. Two of the most recent polls—the 46th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools and the 2014 Education Next Survey—found that fewer than half of respondents were either aware of or knew much about Common Core. Both polls were conducted in May and June of 2014. In the PDK/Gallup Poll, 47% of respondents said they knew either a great deal or a fair amount about the Common Core standards as opposed to 53% who said they knew only a little or nothing at all. The Education Next Survey found similar results—43% of respondents said they had heard of Common Core, while 57% said they had not.³⁴

Other groups that have conducted surveys include such national organizations as Achieve, Inc., and the National Collaborative for Student Success, and state-level entities such as the University of Connecticut, Middle Tennessee State University, the Public Policy Institute of California, and the LSU Public Policy Research Lab.³⁵

The LSU Public Policy Research Lab surveyed state residents in the spring as part of its 2014 Louisiana Survey. The survey found that nearly one out of two Louisiana residents had not heard of Common Core. Of those who had, 48 percent said they were very or somewhat confident that using the standards would result in students being college or career ready. However, 35 percent said they were not at all or not very confident that the standards would help ensure students were ready.³⁶

End Notes

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- ⁴ Sarah Garland, “Why the Common Core?,” *The Hechinger Report*, Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media, http://hechinger-report.org/content/why-the-common-core_13310
- ⁵ Garland, “Why Common Core”; “Understanding the Common Core State Standards,” Achieve, Inc., www.achieve.org/files/CCSS-OverviewMarch2012FINAL.pptx, p. 2
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- ⁸ “Louisiana Believes: Level the Playing Field, Compete for Opportunity,” Louisiana Department of Education, www.louisianabelieves.net, p. 7
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- ¹¹ “Louisiana Believes,” Department of Education, p. 11
- ¹² “Louisiana Believes,” Department of Education, p. 16
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- ²² “Key Shifts in English Language Arts,” Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org
- ²³ “Understanding the Common Core,” Achieve, p. 24
- ²⁴ “Understanding the Skills in the Common Core State Standards,” Achieve, Inc., www.achieve.org/Skills-CCSS, p. 7

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Appendix A - Assessment Scores

PISA - Reading Literacy Assessment 2000 to 2012						
Rank	Country	2012	2009	2006	2003	2000
1	Shanghai China	570	556	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	Hong Kong-China	545	533	536	510	525
3	Singapore	542	526	n/a	n/a	n/s
4	Japan	538	520	498	498	522
5	Republic of Korea	536	539	556	534	525
6	Finland	524	536	547	543	546
7	Ireland	523	496	517	515	527
8	Canada	523	524	527	527	534
9	Chinese Taipei	523	49	496	n/a	n/a
10	Poland	518	500	598	497	479
11	Estonia	516	501	501	n/a	n/a
12	Liechtenstein	516	499	510	525	483
13	New Zealand	512	521	521	522	529
14	Australia	512	515	513	525	528
15	Netherlands	511	508	507	513	n/a
16	Switzerland	509	501	499	499	494
17	Macao-China	509	487	492	498	n/a
18	Belgium	509	506	501	507	507
19	Vietnam	508	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
20	Germany	508	497	495	491	484
24	United States	498	500	n/a	495	504

Note: Countries ranked in order based on 2012 results. An entry of n/a means students in that country either did not take the test or not enough took the test to make the results relevant.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Appendix A - Assessment Scores (Cont.)

PISA - Science Assessment 2006 to 2012				
Rank	Country	2012	2009	2006
1	Shanghai China	580	575	n/a
2	Hong Kong-China	555	549	542
3	Singapore	551	542	n/a
4	Japan	547	539	531
5	Finland	545	554	563
6	Estonia	541	528	531
7	Republic of Korea	538	538	522
8	Vietnam	528	n/a	n/a
9	Poland	526	508	498
10	Canada	525	529	534
11	Liechtenstein	525	520	522
12	Germany	524	520	516
13	Chinese Taipei	523	520	532
14	Netherlands	522	522	525
15	Ireland	522	508	508
16	Australia	521	527	527
17	Macao-China	521	511	511
18	New Zealand	516	532	530
19	Switzerland	515	517	512
20	Slovenia	514	512	519
28	United States	497	502	489
<p>Note: Countries ranked in order based on 2012 results. An entry of n/a means students in that country either did not take the test or not enough took the test to make the results relevant.</p> <p>Source: National Center for Education Statistics</p>				

Appendix B - Anchor Standards

ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR MATHEMATICS

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them (Understand mathematical problems and persist in solving them)
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively (Think about different aspects of a problem as separate and related parts)
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the understanding of others (Understand a concept well enough to explain and defend an answer)
4. Model with mathematics (Apply understanding of a concept to a real-life situation)
5. Use appropriate tools strategically (Choose the right resources to help solve problems)
6. Attend to precision (Pay attention to the details)
7. Look for and make use of structure (Find and use patterns in problems)
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning (Notice if calculations are repeated, and look both for general methods and for shortcuts)

ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING

Key Ideas and Details:

- Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure:

- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

- Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.¹
- Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

- Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING

Text Types and Purposes:

- Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing:

- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
- Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge:

- Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Range of Writing:

- Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Comprehension and Collaboration:

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

- Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR LANGUAGE

Conventions of Standard English:

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Knowledge of Language:

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:

- Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

Source: Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org

Appendix C - Key Shifts

Key Shifts in Mathematics

The Common Core State Standards for Mathematics build on the best of existing standards and reflect the skills and knowledge students will need to succeed in college, career, and life. Understanding how the standards differ from previous standards—and the necessary shifts they call for—is essential to implementing them. The following are the key shifts called for by the Common Core:

Greater focus on fewer topics

The Common Core calls for greater focus in mathematics. Rather than racing to cover many topics in a mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum, the standards ask math teachers to significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy are spent in the classroom. This means focusing deeply on the major work of each grade as follows:

- In grades K–2: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to addition and subtraction
- In grades 3–5: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions
- In grade 6: Ratios and proportional relationships, and early algebraic expressions and equations
- In grade 7: Ratios and proportional relationships, and arithmetic of rational numbers
- In grade 8: Linear algebra and linear functions

This focus will help students gain strong foundations, including a solid understanding of concepts, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the classroom.

Coherence: Linking topics and thinking across grades

Mathematics is not a list of disconnected topics, tricks, or mnemonics; it is a coherent body of knowledge made up of interconnected concepts. Therefore, the standards are designed around coherent progressions from grade to grade. Learning is carefully connected across grades so that students can build new understanding onto foundations built in previous years. For example, in 4th grade, students must “apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction by a whole number” (Standard 4.NF.4). This extends to 5th grade, when students are expected to build on that skill to “apply and extend previous understandings of multiplication to multiply a fraction or whole number by a fraction” (Standard 5.NF.4). Each standard is not a new event, but an extension of previous learning.

Coherence is also built into the standards in how they reinforce a major topic in a grade by utilizing supporting, complementary topics. For example, instead of presenting the topic of data displays as an end in itself, the topic is used to support grade-level word problems in which students apply mathematical skills to solve problems.

Rigor: Pursue conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application with equal intensity

To help students meet the standards, educators will need to pursue, with equal intensity, three aspects of rigor in the major work of each grade: conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application.

- **Conceptual understanding:** The standards call for conceptual understanding of key concepts, such as place value and ratios. Students must be able to access concepts from a number of perspectives in order to see math as more than a set of mnemonics or discrete procedures.
- **Procedural skills and fluency:** The standards call for speed and accuracy in calculation. Students must practice core functions, such as single-digit multiplication, in order to have access to more complex concepts and procedures. Fluency must be addressed in the classroom or through supporting materials, as some students might require more practice than others.
- **Application:** The standards call for students to use math in situations that require mathematical knowledge. Correctly applying mathematical knowledge depends on students having a solid conceptual understanding and procedural fluency.

Rigor refers to deep, authentic command of mathematical concepts, not making math harder or introducing topics at earlier grades.

Key Shifts in English Language Arts

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy build on the best of existing standards and reflect the skills and knowledge students will need to succeed in college, career, and life. Understanding how the standards differ from previous standards—and the necessary shifts they call for—is essential to implementing the standards well.

The following are key shifts called for by the Common Core:

1. Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language

Rather than focusing solely on the skills of reading and writing, the ELA/literacy standards highlight the growing complexity of the texts students must read to be ready for the demands of college, career, and life. The standards call for a staircase of increasing complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also outline a progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from what they read.

Closely related to text complexity and inextricably connected to reading comprehension is a focus on academic vocabulary: words that appear in a variety of content areas (such as ignite and commit). The standards call for students to grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversation, direct instruction, and reading. They ask students to determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their range of words and phrases. Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation, but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Because the standards are the roadmap for successful classrooms, and recognizing that teachers, school districts, and states need to decide on the journey to the destination, they intentionally do not include a required reading list. Instead, they include numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect during the year.

The standards include certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and the writings of Shakespeare. The standards appropriately defer the majority of decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, schools, and teachers.

2. Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational

The Common Core emphasizes using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear information. Rather than asking students questions they can answer solely from their prior knowledge and experience, the standards call for students to answer questions that depend on their having read the texts with care.

The reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence in the text. Students should be able to answer a range of text-dependent questions, whose answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.

Frequently, forms of writing in K–12 have drawn heavily from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college, career, and life. Though the standards still expect narrative writing throughout the grades, they also expect a command of sequence and detail that are essential for effective argumentative and informative writing. The standards’ focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice.

3. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

Students must be immersed in information about the world around them if they are to develop the strong general knowledge and vocabulary they need to become successful readers and be prepared for college, career, and life. Informational texts play an important part in building students’ content knowledge. Further, it is vital for students to have extensive opportunities to build knowledge through texts so they can learn independently.

In K-5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading includes content-rich nonfiction in history/social studies, sciences, technical studies, and the arts. The K-5 standards strongly recommend that texts—both within and across grades—be selected to support students in systematically developing knowledge about the world.

In grades 6-12, there is much greater attention on the specific category of literary nonfiction, which is a shift from traditional standards. To be clear, the standards pay substantial attention to literature throughout K-12, as it constitutes half of the reading in K-5 and is the core of the work of 6-12 ELA teachers. Also in grades 6-12, the standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening should span the school day from K-12 as integral parts of every subject.

Source: Common Core State Standards Initiative, www.corestandards.org



Appendix D - State Comparisons

State <i>Standards Name</i>	Adopted Common Core	Did Not Adopt Common Core	Repealed Common Core	Current Member of PARCC Consortium	Current Member of Smarter Balanced Consortium
Alabama <i>Alabama College and Career Ready Initiative</i>	✓				
Alaska		✓			
Arizona <i>Arizona's College & Career Ready Standards</i>	✓				
Arkansas	✓			✓	
California	✓				✓
Colorado† <i>Colorado Academic Standards</i>	✓			✓	
Connecticut	✓				✓
Delaware	✓				✓
District of Columbia	✓			✓	
Florida† <i>Mathematics Florida Standards & Language Arts Florida Standards</i>	✓				
Georgia <i>Common Core Georgia Performance Standards</i>	✓				
Hawaii	✓				✓
Idaho <i>Idaho Core Standards</i>	✓				✓
Illinois	✓			✓	
Indiana	✓		✓		
Iowa† <i>Iowa Core</i>	✓				✓ ⁺⁺
Kansas <i>Kansas College and Career Ready Standards</i>	✓				
Kentucky <i>Kentucky Core Academic Standards</i>	✓				
Louisiana	✓			✓	
Maine <i>Maine Learning Results</i>	✓				✓

Appendix D - State Comparisons (Cont.)

State <i>Standards Name</i>	Adopted Common Core	Did Not Adopt Common Core	Repealed Common Core	Current Member of PARCC Consortium	Current Member of Smarter Balanced Consortium
Maryland <i>Maryland College and Career-Ready Standards</i>	✓			✓	
Massachusetts	✓			✓	
Michigan	✓				✓
Minnesota <i>(ELA only)</i>	✓				
Mississippi	✓			✓	
Missouri* <i>Missouri Learning Standards</i>	✓				✓
Montana	✓				✓
Nebraska		✓			
Nevada <i>Nevada Academic Content Standards</i>	✓				✓
New Hampshire	✓				✓
New Jersey <i>New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards</i>	✓			✓	
New Mexico	✓			✓	
New York <i>Common Core Learning Standards</i>	✓			✓	
North Carolina* <i>Common Core State and North Carolina Essential Standards</i>	✓				✓
North Dakota	✓				✓
Ohio <i>New Learning Standards</i>	✓			✓	
Oklahoma <i>Oklahoma Academic Standards</i>	✓		✓		
Oregon	✓				✓
Pennsylvania <i>Pennsylvania Core Standards</i>	✓			✓++	✓++

Appendix D - State Comparisons (Cont.)

State <i>Standards Name</i>	Adopted Common Core	Did Not Adopt Common Core	Repealed Common Core	Current Member of PARCC Consortium	Current Member of Smarter Balanced Consortium
Rhode Island	✓			✓	
South Carolina*	✓				
South Dakota	✓				✓
Tennessee <i>TN-Core</i>	✓				
Texas		✓			
Utah <i>Utah Core Standards</i>	✓				
Vermont	✓				✓
Virginia		✓			
Washington <i>Washington Core Standards</i>	✓				✓
West Virginia <i>West Virginia State Learning Standards</i>	✓				✓
Wisconsin	✓				✓
Wyoming†	✓				✓

*Although state has passed legislation repealing Common Core and withdrawing from testing consortium, the Common Core standards will remain in effect at least through the 2014-2015 school year while a committee works to develop state-specific standards.

†Legislation has been introduced or is pending to repeal the state's participation in Common Core, withdraw it from the assessment consortium or both.

++ Pennsylvania is listed as an advisory state in the Smarter Balanced consortium and a participating state in the PARCC consortium, while Iowa is listed as an advisory state in Smarter Balanced. That means they had an interest in the consortia's activities but were not necessarily going to use their assessments. And in fact, officials in both states have indicated they are withdrawing from the consortia and will be using their own assessments.

Source: Chart put together by LLA staff based on information gathered from individual states' websites and departments of Education.