

THE COMMON CORE FACT SHEET

WHAT IS THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARD INITIATIVE?

The Common Core State Standard Initiative, also known as “the Common Core,” is a new program to establish clear English language arts and mathematics expectations for each grade between kindergarten and 12th in the United States educational system. Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Language, Media, and Technology are the categories in the English language arts standards. Moreover, Arithmetic, Fractions, Algebra, Geometry, Probability, and Modeling are the key topics in the mathematics standards.

The Common Core is by no means a national curriculum. The standards are a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Although the standards establish what students need to learn, they do not dictate how teachers should teach or what materials they should utilize in the classroom. Some critics argue the Common Core should provide teaching methods and instructional materials to address “how” students should learn not just “what” students should conceptually understand at specific intervals. On the other hand, having a national curriculum would also be another controversy. Therefore, teachers will continue to individualize instruction to students based on the standards.

WHY WERE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS CREATED?

The Common Core is a set of internationally benchmarked standards designed step-by-step to ensure that schools understand the skills and knowledge students need to be prepared to enter college or the workforce. The standards are evidence-based and informed by top performing countries to stay competitive with globalization.

HOW DOES THE COMMON CORE COMPARE TO PREVIOUS STATE STANDARDS?

States are voluntarily adopting these academic standards to unify the participating states with a consistent criteria of proficiency and assessment. Whereas each state previously had a unique definition of grade level proficiency, the new standards are uniform and designed

to raise the math and reading standards. No state has to lower its standards with this new initiative.

WHO WAS INVOLVED IN CREATING AND LEADING THE COMMON CORE INITIATIVE?

The National Governors Association and state educational commissioners led the development of Common Core Standards and continue to lead the initiative through extensive discussion with teachers, parents, school administrators, and experts. The federal government was not involved in the creation or roll out. Local teachers, principals, and superintendents are responsible for managing the implementation of the curriculum to meet the new standards. Since the Common Core is a relatively new initiative and gaining momentum as more schools are incorporating the program, there is a lot to be understood and discovered about the process and expectations. Changes to the standards and the Common Core implementation are to be expected as best practices emerge.

WHICH STATES ARE AND ARE NOT PARTICIPATING IN THE COMMON CORE?

As of January 2014, forty-five U.S. states and the District of Columbia have formally adopted the standards. States are beginning the implementation between the 2011-12 and 2015-16 academic years. The non-participating states are Texas, Alaska, Virginia, and Nebraska. Currently, Minnesota is adopting the English language arts standards only.

WHEN WILL THE COMMON CORE ASSESSMENTS BE AVAILABLE?

Some states are using new assessments to align with the Common Core Standards. Many states are collaborating to develop universal assessments that will be used nationally as early as in the 2014-15 school year. However, not all states will begin using the Common Core assessments immediately; this will also vary from state to state. Application of the standards for students with disabilities will continue to be given further consideration.

The Common Core and Kumon

HOW DOES THE KUMON PROGRAM ALIGN WITH THE COMMON CORE?

With over 50 years of experience, Kumon is also internationally benchmarked and designed to contain the elements essential for studying college-level Calculus and advanced literary texts. Our mutual goal is to raise the academic standards for all students who study in our programs. Kumon's math curriculum is the same throughout forty-seven countries, and Kumon's reading program is customized in eleven different languages or dialects. The curricula structure will remain as is, as it has shown itself to be effective over a considerable amount of time. Kumon and the Common Core share a belief in consistent assessments and equalizing the playing field in education. Kumon is a supplement to the school curriculum and can complement the Common Core Standards, which share many academic competencies with Kumon. This fact sheet is just an overview. A detailed grade-by-grade analysis of Kumon including the RRL and the Common Core will be released quarterly in VOICES Magazine.

WHY DOES THE COMMON CORE AND KUMON HAVE VARIATIONS BETWEEN WHAT IS GRADE LEVEL MATERIAL?

Kumon fosters in students the skills and confidence to study any school curriculum and become a life-long learner. Although Kumon and the Common Core might not correspond at every grade level, Kumon's goal is for students to advance beyond their school grade level, while building the math and reading skills necessary to succeed in any program or standards-based curriculum. It is important to note that the Common Core Standards are a work-in-progress and may change as more information becomes known about the application of the standards.

DOES KUMON DEVELOP CRITICAL THINKING, WHICH IS A SKILL REQUIRED IN COMMON CORE STANDARDS?

Yes. Kumon's goal is beyond students just improving their knowledge in math or reading; Kumon instills in students the skills and mindset for learning material that they have not encountered yet without being taught.

As students build a strong foundation by mastering math and English language arts basic skills, students also build critical thinking by analyzing example problems on the worksheets and reading difficult passages. The Kumon Math worksheets include incrementally challenging examples at the start of each learning focus. By careful examination, students form connections in their minds between the new concept and topics they have already studied. Logically thinking about Fractions, Equations, Factorization, Functions, and Graphs prepares students to independently study Calculus. In addition, reading students must be able to read passages critically and draw evidence from informational or literary texts to support their analysis, reflection, or opinions. As students' progress, they accumulate the skills needed to read, examine a passage, summarize, form an opinion and defend their thoughts. The last three levels in the Reading Curriculum are in the "Critique Block" where students deepen their understanding of literature as well as read and write critically through concepts such as content evaluation. A fundamental goal of Kumon is to develop in students the ability to think logically and learn independently, which is at the core of developing critical thinking skills.

HOW CAN KUMON HELP EACH CHILD TO BE PREPARED FOR THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS?

The materials used in the Kumon program were designed with the aim of producing the greatest learning effect in the shortest possible amount of time. Kumon develops reading, mathematical, and logical thinking abilities in students. Furthermore, students often improve their thinking speed, concentration, and confidence, which are important test-taking skills. Within the first year in the program, Kumon aims for all students to catch up to their school grade level and then go on to study above grade level to further their skills and knowledge. However, each student's learning situation is different, and instructors individualize their instruction to be at an appropriate pace to achieve as quickly as possible. As students continue through the Kumon program and study materials beyond grade level, they find that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish goals and many other things they did not think possible before. This helps student motivation and academic enjoyment.