

## Should Lutheran Schools Consider Adopting the Common Core State Standards?

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### Background

1. Lutheran schools have a rich heritage and long standing commitment to academic excellence that is rooted in the Christ-centered mission that flows from the Lutheran Confessions. The Common Core State Standards may serve as a tool that enhances curriculum development. They could provide additional guidelines upon which the rigorous programs of study for our students could be designed. The rigor is not the product of the CCSS standards alone; rather, is connected with the instructional process provided by Lutheran educators
2. The Common Core State Standards suggest a set of high-quality academic expectations that all students should master by the end of each grade level. They propose consistent grade-level learning goals for all students and inform parents about learning outcomes, thereby making it easier for parents to collaborate with teachers in helping their children achieve success.
3. The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum. A curriculum includes what, when and how subjects are taught and what materials to use. These matters are not dictated by the Common Core State Standards. For Lutheran schools, these elements will continue to be determined by individual schools, working to meet the needs of their students.
4. The Common Core State Standards represent a fundamental shift in the teaching and learning process. They establish clear, measurable goals for students that assist teachers in making instructional decisions. They place emphasis on creativity, critical and analytical thinking and application to curriculum content. They may serve to assist our schools in guiding the way that instruction takes place in each classroom while allowing the school to develop its own unique curriculum content.

1. Although there has been strong business and educational support for the Common Core State Standards in almost every state that has adopted them, there has been a recent move by some to discredit the standards.
2. The Association of Christian Schools International (ASCI), Christian Schools International (CSI) and The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) support the move toward the Common Core State Standards. The reason? – Its focus on rigor, relevance, best practices, and college and career readiness.

Any movement toward the integration of the standards with Lutheran school curriculum should proceed after careful consideration of two factors:

1. Lutheran schools are empowered to design and direct the integration of the Common Core State Standards within curriculum that ensures the highest quality of academic preparation for students.
2. Lutheran schools must be committed to infuse the Common Core State Standards with the faith, principles and values that are inherent in the unique mission and identity they possess.

### **Summary**

An excellent Lutheran school provides a rigorous academic curriculum that integrates the Christian faith and knowledge. As trained professionals, Lutheran school administrators and teachers continually seek the best instructional methods for educating students. Lutheran schools traditionally have developed their own standards or adapted state standards for use with their own curriculum. Some will continue to do this.

Ultimately, Lutheran schools will determine independently which standards to follow. The process of that discovery must remain true to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod's (LCMS) Christ-centered mission: to provide a solid, Christian education developed with standards that drive instruction so that every child can be reached with an effective education – one that centers on the LCMS faith. The Common Core State Standards may be considered a tool that would allow LCMS schools to more fully prepare its students for service and witness to Christ and the world.

### **Myths about Content and Quality: General**

**Myth:** Adopting common state standards will force all 50 states to accept the lowest common denominator, which means states with high standards could be taking a step backward.

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards are designed to build upon the most advanced, up-to-date practices and methodologies for preparing all students for success in college and future careers. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The Common Core State *Standards* were informed by the country's leading educators, the highest international standards, and data relative to educational outcomes. There is demonstrated need for a set of college-readiness and career preparatory standards, because even in the highest

performing states, students are graduating and passing all the required tests but still require remediation in their postsecondary work.

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards only address skills; they do not address the importance of content knowledge.

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards recognize that both content and skills are important. In English Language Arts, the standards require certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature and Shakespeare. Appropriately, decisions about additional core content to be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to addressing content, the Common Core State Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Regarding Mathematics, the Common Core State Standards assure a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. The standards for middle and high school call for students to practice applying mathematical analytics to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards also set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not as a result of piling topic upon topic but by ensuring that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to novel and complex situations, such as they might encounter in college and vocational settings.

### **Myths about Content and Quality: English Language Arts**

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards suggest teaching "Grapes of Wrath" to second graders.

**Fact:** The English Language Arts standards suggest "Grapes of Wrath" as a text that would be appropriate for ninth-or 10<sup>th</sup>-grade readers. Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, thereby forging a gap between actual and desired ability. The Common Core State Standards implements a stepped approach for increasing text complexity so that students can better develop their skills and apply them to increasingly complex texts.

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards are just vague descriptions of skills; they do not include reading lists or other similar references to content.

**Fact:** A review of sample tests confirms that the Common Core State Standards reflect the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning requirement upheld in the standards. The exemplars of high-quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities and have been well received. Thus, the standards offer an outstanding set of references for teachers, which they can use while making their own decisions about what texts to use.

**Myth:** English teachers will be asked to teach science and social studies reading materials.

**Fact:** Under the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards, English teachers will continue to teach literature and literary non-fiction. However, because college and vocational readiness demands the ability to use complex texts beyond the literary field, these standards also ensure that students are being prepared to read, write and research across the curriculum, including in history and science. These goals can be achieved by ensuring that teachers in other disciplines also focus on improving and increasing reading and writing abilities within their subject areas.

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards don't place enough emphasis on fiction/literature.

**Fact:** The standards require certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature and Shakespeare. Appropriately, decisions about additional core content to be taught are left to state and local determination. In addition to addressing content, the Common Core State Standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking and listening.

### **Myths about Content and Quality: Mathematics**

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards do not prepare or require students to learn Algebra in the eighth grade, as current standards in many states do.

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in eighth grade by including the prerequisites for this course in grades K-7. Students who master the K-7 material will be able to take Algebra 1 in eighth grade. At the same time, eighth-grade standards address rigorous algebra and will transition students effectively onto a full Algebra 1 course.

**Myth:** Key math topics are missing or appear in the wrong grade.

**Fact:** One of the problems with having 50 different sets of state standards is that different states cover different topics in different grade levels. Coming to consensus guarantees that from the viewpoint of any given state, topics will move up or down in the grade level sequence. This is unavoidable. Under the Common Core State Standards, the progression is mathematically coherent and leads to college and career readiness at an internationally competitive level.

### **Myths about Process**

**Myth:** No teachers were involved in writing the Common Core State Standards.

**Fact:** Drafters of the Common Core State Standards relied heavily on input from teachers and standards experts from across the country. The process was thoughtful and transparent, and was only possible because so many people from across the country worked together to develop the standards. For more information, please visit: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

**Myth:** The Common Core State Standards are not research-or evidence-based.

**Fact:** The Common Core State Standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research, surveys of skills required by students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance, and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.

In English Language Arts, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks in reading and writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In Mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and other studies of high performing countries that traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum must be substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement. This speaks to the recurring theme that curriculum is "a mile wide and an inch deep."

