

South Dakota Common Core Standards: Frequently Asked Questions

What are South Dakota's Common Core Standards?

South Dakota's Common Core Standards refer to a set of standards in the core subject areas of English-language arts and math. The standards provide a clear and rigorous set of expectations for what South Dakota students (grades K-12) should know and be able to do in each of these two critical subject areas. The standards are shared by a number of states.

How are they different from previous standards?

South Dakota has had standards in various subject areas, including English-language arts and math, for many years. The new standards in English and math are different in that they promote:

- Deeper understanding of the key concepts students need to succeed as independent thinkers;
- Students' ability to apply knowledge to real-world situations;
- Instruction that places more emphasis on understanding and application, as opposed to memorization and test-taking
- Richer, more authentic types of assessment

How were the new standards developed?

The idea to develop a shared set of standards among the states began as a conversation among the nation's governors and chief education leaders. A group of 45 states banded together to set consistent, high quality expectations. The standards were developed by teams of teachers, researchers and leading education experts from across the United States. Each partner-state chose whether or not to adopt the standards.

When did South Dakota adopt the new standards?

The South Dakota Board of Education voted to adopt the new standards in English-language arts and math on Nov. 29, 2010.

When will implementation of the new standards take place?

Teachers across the state have begun training on how to foster the deeper levels of understanding and higher-order thinking skills needed of students under the new standards. The standards should be fully implemented in school year 2013-14, with a new assessment to follow in 2014-15.

What will the new assessment look like?

The new assessment, based on the new standards, will replace the current Dakota STEP test. The new test will incorporate more short answer and constructed response questions, as opposed to the current status quo of mostly multiple choice questions. It is also important to note that the new assessment will be delivered solely online, and districts are already preparing for this transition.

Do students still need to memorize math facts?

Yes. While the new math standards emphasize thorough understanding, (meaning students will know how and why concepts work) they will still require students to perform simple calculations quickly and easily.

Does classic literature have a place under the new English standards?

Yes. While the new English-language arts standards infuse more informational text into student reading, teachers will continue to teach literary classics as they always have. The English-language arts standards do not limit reading to non-fiction but suggest a balance between literature and non-fiction texts (for example, the Gettysburg Address), so students can build knowledge and broaden their perspectives. This exposure to informational text will help students be prepared for the type of reading they will encounter in the workforce.

Is there federal money attached to the adoption of Common Core?

The Common Core is not federally mandated, and South Dakota did not receive any federal money tied to adoption of the new standards.

I've heard that the Common Core dictates curriculum for local school districts. Is that true?

No. The new standards in English-language arts and math are not curriculum. School districts still set their own curriculum, as they always have. It's important to understand the difference between standards and curriculum; the two terms should not be used interchangeably. Standards provide the framework of expectations for student knowledge and skills. Curriculum details how the standards should be taught and includes resources, materials and instruction.

In South Dakota, the state Board of Education is charged with adopting standards. Local school districts have the authority to decide how to teach and implement the standards, including the selection of instructional materials and practices.

Are there Common Core standards for history and social studies, or any other content areas?

There were no Common Core standards developed for social studies, only English language arts (ELA) and math. Teachers may choose to use some ELA concepts, such as identifying an author's point of view and questioning that which is presented as fact in a text, as part of their writing assignments in a history class; however, the new standards do not attempt to outline what is taught in social studies classes.