



## Common Core, PARCC and Next Generation Science Standards

### Common Core

Arkansas’s English language arts and math curriculum frameworks are being replaced with the **Common Core State Standards (CCSS)**. Common Core is a state-led effort to provide clear educational standards across all states that adopt them. The goal of Common Core is to establish a set of rigorous standards that ensure first graders in one state, for example, are learning the same math and literacy content as first graders in other states. Forty-five states, including Arkansas, have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards.

The Common Core State Standards initiative began in 2009, through a collaboration between the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Though it was not an effort of the federal government, the Obama administration has endorsed the effort and tied some federal funding to states’ adoption of a common set of education standards.

In 2009, under the direction of Gov. Mike Beebe and then-Education Commissioner Ken James, Arkansas entered a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to support the Common Core State Standards initiative. According to the MOU, Common Core must represent at least 85% of the state’s English language arts and math standards, and the state was required to adopt the Common Core within three years. A year later, the State Board of Education actually adopted the standards. Additionally, the General Assembly’s Act 989 of 2011 endorsed the effort by authorizing the State Board of Education to align Arkansas’s curriculum frameworks with Common Core.

### Comparing Standards

In July 2010, the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) organized a committee of educators to analyze the Common

Core to see how closely the standards aligned with Arkansas’s existing curriculum frameworks. The group found that most of the Common Core standards were an “excellent” or “good” match with Arkansas’s standards, although the grade levels for the standards may not match exactly. For example, the CCSS call for kindergartners to know number names and count sequence and to be able to write numbers from 0 to 20. Arkansas had two standards that closely matched that Common Core standard, but one was taught in kindergarten and the other in first grade.

Some Common Core standards did not appear in any of the existing Arkansas frameworks. For example, one Common Core standard calls for kindergartners to “understand that each successive number name refers to a quantity that is one larger.” The existing Arkansas standards, prior to the adoption of Common Core, did not include a similar standard. Twelve Common Core standards in math were new in Arkansas, while all English language arts standards matched to some degree with existing Arkansas standards.

Common Core is being introduced in Arkansas schools over a three-year period. School districts began teaching the new standards in 2011-12, and they will start the third year of implementation in the fall.

Grades	Implementation Year
K-2	2011-12
3-8	2012-13
9-12	2013-14

### PARCC

In addition to adopting Common Core, ADE has also been involved in a 21-state (and Washington D.C.) consortium — **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)** — that is developing student assessments aligned with the Common Core standards. The PARCC assessments will replace Arkansas’s current Benchmark exams and

are expected to be ready for implementation in the 2014-15 school year in math and English language arts, grades 3 through 11.

All of the PARCC assessments will be administered online, which is expected to require an increase in bandwidth for many districts. Additionally, education officials anticipate a decline in student test scores—an “implementation dip”—the first year the PARCC assessments are used. Declines in test scores over the next couple of years are also expected because schools will be teaching the Common Core standards but testing students with the assessments aligned to the old standards.

The transition to Common Core and PARCC assessments may also require adjustments in other areas. For example, students typically take keyboarding in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but because Common Core assessments eventually will be given online to 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, educators must decide whether keyboarding should be introduced in earlier grades. Moving keyboarding to elementary grades then will affect teacher licensure, which is now part of the middle school license.

### Next Generation Science Standards

Arkansas is also involved in the development of the **Next Generation Science Standards**, a collaborative effort of 26 states, the National Research Council, the National Science Teachers Association, and other organizations.

The final Next Generation standards were released in April 2013. In June, Rhode Island became the first state to adopt the standards. The Arkansas State Board of Education has not yet adopted the standards, but has asked a team of educators to review them for possible adoption.