

# Nevada Education FAQs: Moving to the Nevada Common Core Standards

## THE NEVADA COMMON CORE STANDARDS

### **What are the Common Core State Standards?**

The Common Core State Standards are a set of academic standards, or learning goals, for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt. The Nevada State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (the Nevada Common Core Standards) in October 2010.

The standards outline what students should master in each grade and shape curriculum development at each grade level. The standards establish a clear roadmap of academic expectations, so that students, parents, and teachers can work together toward shared goals. The standards are clear, concise, and relevant to the real world, focusing on the knowledge and skills students will need to succeed in life after high school, in both postsecondary education and a globally competitive workforce.

### **How were the Common Core State Standards developed?**

The Common Core State Standards were developed through a voluntary state-led effort coordinated by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, with contributions from nearly every state. The standards are research-based and reflect high educational expectations and best practices in this country and from round the world.

### **Why has Nevada adopted the Nevada Common Core Standards?**

Nevada has adopted the Nevada Common Core Standards in order to raise the learning expectations and align instruction accordingly to ensure that our students are ready for college-level content and careers. The standards are critical to Nevada's goal to increase the high school graduation rate as well as the number of students completing certificates or degrees at Nevada higher education institutions. The Nevada State Board of Education adopted the standards in English language arts and mathematics in October 2010.

### **How do the Nevada Common Core Standards differ from the previous state standards?**

The new standards will mean changes in math and English language arts curriculum as well as changes in how these subjects are taught. In mathematics, teachers will be expected to focus on three or four big ideas in math for each grade level, rather than attempting a wide range of topics in one school year. Emphasis will be put on deeper understanding of content, and topics will be worked on over a series of concepts logically connected from one grade to the next and linked to other major topics in the grade.

In English language arts, teachers in all content areas will share responsibility for literacy development. There will be some shifts in the types of texts students will be expected to master. Students will be expected to be able to read literary and informational text closely, and with deep understanding. Text will include more nonfiction, or informational text. Students will be required to engage in short and extended research projects during the school year to analyze, synthesize, and reflect on complex texts.

### **How will Nevada students benefit from the standards?**

The standards will be an important step in making sure Nevada students are college and career ready and competitive with students from other states. Better prepared high school students will become better prepared college students who are more likely to continue and complete certificate and degree programs, resulting in a stronger workforce that can boost the state's economy.

### **What challenges should be expected in implementing the standards?**

There will be a period of adjustment as students and teachers adapt to the new standards and content. More rigorous standards will mean more challenging material, but a team approach involving the Nevada Higher Education System, and the Nevada Department of Education, and local school districts will help bridge the gap in preparation and readiness at all levels of education in the state.

The new standards will bring new assessments. Nevada has joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which is a state-led effort to develop assessments aligned to the standards. The assessments and standards are designed to accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. Nevada is one of the SBAC governing states and is helping to develop instructional tools, student assessments, professional development resources, technical evaluations and other resources aligned to the Nevada Common Core Standards.

### **What is the timeline for implementing the new standards?**

The process of implementing the Nevada Common Core Standards is underway, with implementation occurring in the early grades as they move from Nevada's State Standards. The new standards will be fully implemented in Nevada schools, from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in the [2015-16 school year](#).

### **Will the new standards lower the expectations Nevada has for its students?**

Nevada adopted its Common Core Standards as part of a state-created education reform plan to ensure college and career readiness for all students. Nevada will raise its standards as part of the adoption. The standards were built on the best and highest state standards in the nation, examining the expectations of other high-performing nations around the world, and careful study of the research and literature on what students need to know and be able to do to succeed in college and careers.

### **Were any teachers and faculty involved in the development of the standards?**

The drafting process for the standards relied on teachers and standards experts from across the nation, including faculty from Nevada.

## **IMPACT ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **How will higher education be affected by the new standards?**

The Nevada Common Core Standards will bring about significant changes for both K-12 and higher education. That is why colleges and universities will play a key role in their effective and seamless implementation. Higher education institutions will re-evaluate how teachers are prepared and will partner with K-12 schools to identify and respond to professional development needs. Two- and four-year institutions also will need to look at the content of first-year courses to see if they include material outside of what students will be learning as part of the Nevada Common Core Standards and also review how the assessments will be used to determine which students need remedial courses and in which areas. The

Nevada System of Higher Education System, its institutions and the Nevada Department of Education and local school districts are already partnering to develop strategies that will help identify high school students who are not ready for college-level work and give them the support they need to more effectively transition to college or career training.

### **How will higher education benefit from the Nevada Common Core Standards?**

Higher education stands to benefit in several ways from the Nevada Common Core Standards. First, students will graduate from high school better prepared for college and will need less remediation. College students who do not need remediation are also more likely to earn a degree or finish a certification program and at lower costs to them and their institutions, which will mean resources for other areas. Higher education faculty also will be able to spend more time going deeper in to complex material with their students.

### **How has the state's higher education system been involved in the Nevada Common Core Standards?**

Since the state's adoption of the Nevada Common Core Standards, Nevada higher education officials and faculty continue to work with local and state education officials to identify and meet challenges of the transition. For example, higher education representatives have served on the Regional Professional Development Program, which the Nevada Department of Education is using to support the transition to the new standards.

Nevada also is state leader in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which is a state-led coalition that is developing assessments in support of the Common Core Standards. As a governing state, Nevada higher education officials have helped develop instructional tools, assessments, professional development materials and technical support as part of the new standards and assessments.

### **Has higher education been doing anything to help K-12 students?**

The Nevada System of Higher Education System and its institutions are working on partnerships with local school districts to identify early high school students who are not ready for college-level work and give them supports and services to address their needs so they can successfully transition from high school to college or the workforce under the new standards. As part of that work, higher education and K-12 officials are identifying and reviewing existing higher education and K-12 partnerships that are in place in an effort to ensure that high school students have every opportunity to develop the skills they need to transition to college.

### **What are the different roles that the higher education community can play in the transition?**

**Higher education administrators** must be familiar with the new standards while ensuring that faculty members understand them, see the implications on campus and in local K-12 schools, and receive adequate support in their work.

**Teacher preparation programs** have a major role in preparing new K-12 educators for the demands of the standards and creating professional development opportunities to help experienced teachers succeed in classrooms where math and English language arts must be taught differently.

**College faculty in the arts and sciences** will have to consider adjusting how they teach entry-level courses, taking into account the knowledge and skills that will be expected of incoming students as part of the new standards. As part of this process, higher education and K-12 educators will need to communicate and strengthen partnerships to share needs, experiences, and learning opportunities.

## **THE SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENTS**

### **What is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?**

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a state-led effort to develop assessments aligned to the new standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The assessments and standards are designed to accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. Nevada is an SBAC governing state, which means that Nevada is helping to develop the assessment and support materials.

### **What are the Smarter Balanced assessments?**

The Smarter Balanced assessments will gauge student mastery of the new standards through computer-adaptive testing. The assessments will go beyond multiple-choice questions to include extended response and technology-enhanced items, as well as extended activities, or performance tasks, which allow students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

### **When will the assessments be administered?**

The SBAC is committed to delivering a fully functional assessment system for implementation in the 2014-15 school year. The assessments will be administered at each grade level from grades 3-8, and in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Year-end assessments will be administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year. Optional interim assessments of student progress will be administered at locally determined intervals.

### **What will these scores mean for 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students?**

The SBAC will define the measures and level of content and skill mastery for the 11<sup>th</sup>-grade assessment that marks students as ready for college content and careers, and identifies areas where they need more support.

### **How do the assessments compare to other assessments that are already in place in Nevada?**

SBAC assessments use computer-adaptive technology, which is more precise and efficient than fixed-form testing. Teachers, principals, and parents can receive results from computerized assessments in weeks, not months. Faster results mean that teachers can use the information from optional interim assessments throughout the school year to tailor instruction and better meet the unique needs of students.

### **How will the SBAC assessment compare to other pre-college tests such as SAT and ACT?**

SBAC assessments are not designed to determine admission to colleges and universities, only to determine college-content readiness. SBAC assessments will not replace the SAT or ACT. Colleges and universities will have the option to use SBAC assessment scores to gauge readiness for entry-level, credit-bearing courses. Colleges and universities will use this information alone or in combination with other information.

### **How are Nevada higher education institutions involved in the Smarter Balanced assessments?**

Nevada has identified a Higher Education Lead, who serves as a liaison between Smarter Balanced and state higher education institutions. In addition, higher education leaders hold seats on the Executive Committee and serve on key SBAC work groups and advisory committees.

**Are sample assessment items available for review?**

Yes. Smarter Balanced recently released assessment sample items and performance tasks that illustrate the variety of innovative item types students will encounter on the Smarter Balanced assessments. (See [www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/))