

# Q&A

continued

**So, no testing?** Not exactly. This year teachers were able to use the new computer-based Smarter Balanced Assessment Field Test, as a “dress rehearsal.” The field test of more than 3 million students will evaluate the quality of test questions to ensure they are valid and fair, and serves as a barometer to assess schools’ computer and server capacity, as well as the computer skills of students. Again, we feel this is the “common sense on Common Core” approach.

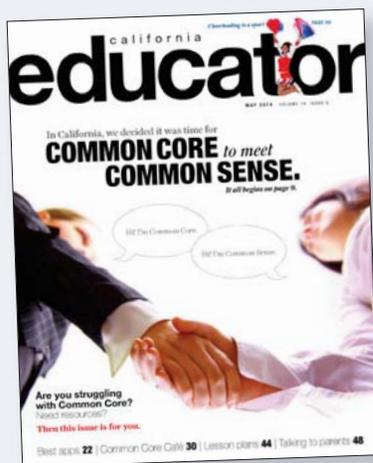
**How is this ever going to work?** The key to success is its implementation. We must work together with parents and community members to demand a plan that makes sense to transition to the new standards, and to ensure next-generation assessment systems are fair and include multiple, appropriate and valid measures of student success.

**What else can teachers do to make sure Common Core implementation is successful?** Bargain it at the negotiating tables. CTA strongly recommends that your local association negotiate consultation processes and agreements, or memorandums of understanding (MOUs), for Common Core State Standards implementation. The better MOUs lay out a well-defined process to deal with issues that may arise and include teachers from the beginning.

**Do you have examples of these “bargained” successes?** Several districts and locals have been doing this. Here are some examples: The Lennox Teachers Association and the Lennox School District agreed to a memorandum of understanding creating a Common Core State Standards Committee that has a majority of five LTA members, to oversee Common Core implementation. The Madera Unified Teachers Association bargained an MOU that establishes a committee of 10 elementary and 10 secondary teachers who will work with a team of administrators in identifying priorities, making recommendations regarding expenditures, and communicating with the classroom teacher.

**Where can I get more information regarding Common Core State Standards?** You can find the standards, lesson plans, strategies, videos and the latest news at [www.cta.org/commoncore](http://www.cta.org/commoncore).

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## The TRUTH about COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Change is never easy, but it is ever constant, especially in education. That's because we are preparing students to enter a world that is constantly changing, and helping them prepare for what's new and what's next.

Right now, California educators are also preparing for what's new and what's next—the Common Core State Standards. The intent of the standards is to arm our students with the critical thinking skills they need to be successful while providing teachers with the creative freedom they need to reach each and every student. This is an enormous undertaking, and it will take time to get it right. That's why in California we are taking a commonsense approach to Common Core.

With any new undertaking, especially one as complex and far-reaching as the standards, questions arise. **So....**

**...we've answer your most frequently asked questions. >>>>>**

# WE ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS



**Were teachers involved in writing the standards?** Yes, the Common Core drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, many state experts came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. There were 11 teachers on California's 21-member Academic Content Standards Commission including CTA members who are experts in their field.

**Do the standards tell teachers what to teach?** Not at all. Teachers know best what works in the classroom. That's why the standards establish what students need to learn, but do not dictate how teachers should teach. The standards actually give teachers more flexibility and a common general focus that allows them to exercise professional judgment in planning instruction.

**Are the standards based on research and evidence?** The standards have made careful use of a large and growing body of evidence. The evidence base includes scholarly research, surveys on what skills are required of 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 Education Progress (NAEP)

## WHERE WE STAND

We will be spending much of this year dealing with the implementation of Common Core State Standards. They put teachers back in control of crafting and tailoring the education of their students. Critical thinking skills can now be part of our students' educational foundation, and we can decide how to best teach that.

And while we support the standards, we do not support the high-stakes testing that some want to bring along with them. CTA supported AB 484, which creates a three-year moratorium on using test results for high stakes accountability. This gives students and teachers time to become more familiar with the new standards and become technologically ready to take the new state assessments.

frameworks in reading and writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that found the traditional U.S. mathematics curriculum standards needed to become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement, addressing the problem of standards that are "a mile wide and an inch deep."

**Don't the standards amount to a national curriculum?** Not at all. The Common Core is not a curriculum. It is a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will help our students succeed. Local teachers, principals, superintendents and others will decide how the standards are to be met. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of students.

**Will the federal government take over ownership of the Common Core State Standards?** The federal government will not govern the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core will remain a state-led effort. California has already independently and boldly made the decision not to implement high-stakes testing until students and teachers become more familiar with the standards.

It is our belief that we cannot test simply for the sake of testing. Student assessments must be thoughtful in their purpose and must include both formative and summative pieces so that learning is assessed throughout the year. This includes educators creating authentic, classroom-based curriculum and assessments along with high quality professional development that is directed by educators.

**Isn't this another scheme by "Corporate America" to take over our public schools?** It's easy to be cynical about the influence of "Corporate America" on our schools, but the truth is that the Common Core State Standards were developed through the National Governors Association with feedback from states, teachers, colleges, the public and the business community. CTA supported the new standards from the beginning because they emphasized critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in today's world.

**I've heard the Common Core State Standards will result in a national database of private student information. Is that true?** No. There are no data collection requirements for states adopting the standards. Standards define expectations for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Implementing the Common Core State Standards does not require data collection. The means of assessing students and the use of the data that result from those assessments are up to the discretion of each state and are separate and distinct from the Common Core.

**Are the standards age appropriate? I've heard that they suggest teaching The Grapes of Wrath to second-graders. What's up with that?** The English Language Arts standards suggest *The Grapes of Wrath* as a text that would be appropriate for 9th or 10th grade readers. Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is demanded in college and the workplace, creating a gap between what high school students can do and what they need to be able to do. The Common Core State Standards create a staircase of increasing text complexity, so that students are expected to both develop their skills and apply them to more and more complex texts.

**Common Core math doesn't make sense. Isn't it just confusing students?** It's true that there is a lot of explaining of why and how students got their answers in math classes under the new standards. That's certainly a change. Still, teachers who have implemented the new standards are reporting that the new content is preferable over "drill and kill" worksheets. The new approach might be considered philosophical as well as mathematical, but the overarching goal is for students to discover

math for themselves. It's no longer enough to train students to do the same thing as a calculator.

**OK, but why don't the standards prepare or require algebra in 8th grade?** The standards do accommodate and prepare students for Algebra 1 in 8th 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 8th grade.

**Have these standards been proven or tested in the classroom? Aren't kids just guinea pigs?** Many veteran teachers will view Common Core State Standards as a welcome return to when they were able to exercise creativity and flexibility in their approach. So, in a way, the standards are not untested. For years, CTA has objected to a "one size fits all" approach to learning, which was part and parcel of the No Child Left Behind Act. The Common Core begins to address this by making teachers the experts in the classroom. Implementing the standards may provide a learning curve for some at first, but we are confident that teachers will recognize progress and mastery when they see it.

**Isn't there too much emphasis on non-fiction in Common Core?** The standards require certain critical content including classic myths and stories from around the world, America's founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. The remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to the state and local districts to determine.

**What about high-stakes testing around Common Core?** Thanks to the passage of the CTA-supported AB 484 this year, California teachers will not have to use outdated standardized tests to measure their students' performance while Common Core is being implemented. The law also created a three-year moratorium on using state testing results for high-stakes accountability purposes. This is how California is showing "common sense on Common Core" and illustrates the impact CTA has had on Common Core implementation. We want to make sure it is done right, including assessment.

**More questions on back >>>**