



# REAL LEARNING FOR REAL LIFE

## WHAT IS COMMON CORE AND SMARTER BALANCED?

**Common Core** is a set of high learning standards in math and English language arts that are designed to better prepare K-12 students for success in college, work and life. The standards, which set learning expectations for students at every grade level, were developed and voluntarily adopted by more than 40 states. They are Washington’s K-12 Learning Standards.

**Smarter Balanced** is the new test Washington students take in grades 3-8 and high school. Students first took the tests in spring 2015. The computer-based tests are designed to measure skills like research, listening and communicating reasoning. The tests require students to apply their knowledge to real-world problems, which will help them succeed after they graduate.

### WASHINGTON STUDENTS AND SMARTER BALANCED

In spring 2016, students are taking the Smarter Balanced exams for the second year. In 2015, WA students scored at or near the top in grades 3-8 when compared to all the Smarter Balanced states.

## TOP 3 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT COMMON CORE

### CONSISTENT LEARNING EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Before Common Core, all 50 states had different sets of expectations for what students should know and be able to do in each grade. Common Core provides a consistent set of learning standards and expectations for all students, no matter where they live.



### CLEAR STANDARDS THAT FOCUS ON DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Common Core goes deeper into fewer topics and focuses on developing students’ deeper understanding of key concepts. The standards build on one another, allowing students to apply the skills and knowledge they learned in the previous grade to real-life situations.

### BUILDING THE CRITICAL SKILLS STUDENTS NEED IN THE JOB MARKET

In 2013, Washington had 25,000 unfilled jobs for highly-skilled workers -- and that number is projected to double by 2017. Common Core focuses on building and applying real-world skills students need to be more competitive in the new global economy.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMON CORE AND SMARTER BALANCED

## **Why is Common Core important to you and your child?**

Common Core provides benchmarks, or standards, for teaching and learning at every grade level. Learning standards are concise, consistent descriptions of what students should know and be able to do. They help parents and teachers work together to make sure students have the opportunities they need to succeed in school and in life.

## **Is Common Core better than WA's previous academic standards?**

Yes, the Common Core standards are more rigorous than Washington's previous learning standards in math and English language arts. They focus on key career and college readiness content and skills, including more critical thinking and problem solving. The standards were informed by the best learning standards in the United States and internationally.

## **Why did Washington adopt Common Core standards?**

Washington adopted Common Core because these standards and the aligned teaching resources and tests will help students be better prepared for college and work. Currently in Washington:

- We have one of the largest achievement gaps in the U.S., and are one of only a few states where it continues to grow;
- Less than half of our students graduate ready for college (as measured by college-entrance exams); and
- By 2018, two out of every three jobs in Washington are projected to require a college degree or certificate.

## **Will schools and teachers still have control over teaching materials and other local decisions?**

Yes. The way in which the Common Core learning standards are taught is up to each of Washington's 295 school districts and more than 2,000 schools. Each school or district will continue to have the flexibility to select the teaching materials and resources that best meet the needs of its students.

## **Are Smarter Balanced tests harder than our former state exams?**

Yes, but that's because they are aligned to the new more challenging learning standards, which are designed to better prepare students to be ready for college and careers when they graduate. Our former state exams measured basic skills.

## **Was the number of students meeting standard lower on the new Smarter Balanced exams?**

It's not an apples-to-apples comparison. In spring 2015, scores were lower than what parents had come to expect, but Smarter Balanced tests measure higher learning standards. Washington students, in most grades, scored higher than other students in Smarter Balanced states. The exams set a new baseline for student performance, measuring skills and knowledge students need to succeed after high school, including problem-solving, writing and critical thinking.

## **Where can I learn more about college & career ready standards & assessments in Washington?**

Please visit [www.ReadyWA.org](http://www.ReadyWA.org) and like us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/ReadyWA](http://www.facebook.com/ReadyWA)).

## **COMMON CORE & SMARTER BALANCED TIMELINE**

**2011:** Washington officially adopts Common Core

**2012:** State provides toolkits to teachers and schools to start implementing standards

**2013-14:** Common Core standards taught in every school

**2014:** New Smarter Balanced tests in math and English language arts field tested in WA schools

**2015:** Students took new Smarter Balanced tests for first time

**2016:** Students take new Smarter Balanced tests for second time



Supporting college- and career-ready learning standards