

Dear Germantown Hills School District Parents:

As you know, our District has been working diligently to develop our curricula, instructional methods and assessments to align with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Although it has been over 40 months since the Illinois State Board of Education adopted the CCSS, the last several months have seen the CCSS become an increasingly hot topic on the local, state and national stage. Unfortunately, it appears that the CCSS have now become a political issue. As with anything that becomes politicized, perceptions begin to get clouded by rhetoric and not facts. This document was created to provide factual information about the Common Core State Standards for parents.

What is the history behind the Common Core State Standards?

The beginnings of the Common Core State Standards can be traced as far back as 1996. That year, the first National Education Summit since 1989 was attended by forty governors as well as scores of corporate and educational leaders from across the country. As a result of the two-day Summit, participating governors committed to the development and establishment of “internationally competitive academic standards, assessments to measure academic achievement and accountability systems within their individual states.” The Summit also established “an external, independent, non-governmental group...to provide public leadership, a national clearinghouse, national and international benchmarks, technical assistance and support for reporting on annual progress made by each state and by businesses.” This group became known as Achieve, Inc. To this day, Achieve, Inc. remains the only education reform organization led by a Board of Directors of governors and business leaders.

In 2001, Achieve partnered with the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and The Education Trust to create the American Diploma Project (ADP) to determine whether high school standards at the time were aligned with what was required for success in college and/or the workplace. In 2004, the ADP released a report titled, “*Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma That Counts.*” According to a press release dated Feb. 10, 2004, the research for the report was “based on both statistical analysis of employment data and extensive research involving more than 300 faculty members from two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, front-line managers, and high school educators.” In the report, the ADP concluded “while employer and college academic demands had converged, states’ high school exit expectations fell well short of those demands.”

The cornerstone of the report was a set of English and mathematics standards. The ADP benchmarks concretely defined the English and math that graduates needed to master in order to succeed in credit-bearing college courses and high-performance, high-growth jobs. The ADP went on to recommend that states align their academic standards in high school with the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success using the ADP benchmarks as a starting point. The ADP also recommended back-mapping standards to create a “coherent, focused, grade-by-grade progression from kindergarten through high school graduation.”

Over the next few years, Achieve and the American Diploma Project led the effort to develop common standards that would truly prepare students for college and career readiness. In 2008, Achieve along with the National Governor's Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released a report titled, "*Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*". The report included five steps toward building a globally competitive education system. The first Action Step offered was to "upgrade state standards by adopting a common core of internationally benchmarked standards in math and language arts for grades K-12 to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive."

In April of 2009, the NGA and the CCSSO invited representatives from 41 states to meet in Chicago to launch the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Led by Achieve, writers set out to create a set of K-12 mathematics and English/Language Arts standards that would align with college and career readiness skills. Representatives from forty-eight states and D.C., including teachers, content experts and higher education faculty sat on writing and review committees. Over 10,000 stakeholders, hundreds of whom were educators in Illinois, provided feedback before the final standards were validated by an expert committee and released in final form in June 2010.

The Illinois State Board of Education initially reviewed the standards on June 24, 2010. The standards were also published in the Illinois Register on July 9, 2010, which initiated a 45-day public comment period. The Board adopted the rulemaking on September 24, 2010, and the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules, a bipartisan legislative oversight committee, issued a Certification of No Objection on October 19, 2010. The rulemaking incorporating the standards took effect on October 28, 2010 and was published in the Illinois Register on November 12, 2010.

Are the Common Core State Standards a federal mandate?

As pointed out above, the federal government was not involved at any point in the development of the CCSS. More importantly, it was a voluntary decision of each state to adopt the Standards, and forty-five states did so. In July of 2009, the Department of Education announced the start of the \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" competition. This competition offered competitive grants to reward states who were leading the charge in education reform and innovation in the classrooms. These grants were offered at a time when state budgets for education were shrinking due to loss of revenues. Addressing the extensive research of Achieve and the American Diploma Project, one of the four primary criteria for states to be eligible for the grants was to "adopt internationally benchmarked standards and assessments that prepare students for success in college and the workplace." Because the Common Core State Standards Initiative was going to fully meet this criterion, many states adopted the Standards as a requirement for eligibility.

Do the Common Core State Standards take away control of curriculum and instruction decisions from local school districts?

It is extremely important to note that the Common Core State Standards are just that, standards. The CCSS do not dictate curriculum or instruction to local Districts. As a matter of fact, the introductory pages of both the mathematics and English/Language Arts CCSS documents specifically state, “these Standards do not dictate curriculum or teaching methods.” It is our job as a District to translate the CCSS into an engaging and effective curriculum. Well respected curriculum researchers Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins explain the relationship between the Standards and curriculum this way, “Consider home building and renovation: The standards are like the building code. Architects and builders must attend to them but they are *not* the purpose of the design. The house to be built or renovated is designed to meet the needs of the client in a functional and pleasing manner -- while also meeting the building code along the way.”

Aren't the Common Core State Standards a “One Size Fits All” approach to education?

No. The CCSS are simply benchmarks that we aim for with our students. Because all students learn differently, as educators we have to use multiple modalities in getting our students to master as many of the standards as possible. Teachers still differentiate their instruction; use assessments to determine when to reteach and reflect individually and with colleagues on the effectiveness of their instruction. In short, the CCSS are NOT a “one size fits all” approach to education.

Are the Common Core State Standards more rigorous than the previous Illinois State Standards?

Absolutely! In 2009, the state of Illinois was already in the process of updating the previous state standards, which had not been updated since 1997. The Common Core standards better define what students need to know and be able to do at every grade level from kindergarten through high school so that students are prepared to succeed in college and careers. The CCSS require more active and engaged teaching and learning in the classroom with less emphasis on scripted instruction and multiple choice tests. Students may be required to do more than they have in the past with an emphasis on applying and demonstrating their knowledge.

Unlike the previous Illinois State Standards, the CCSS are internationally benchmarked, aligned with college and career readiness, contain clear and consistent expectations, and provide for procedural and conceptual understanding.

Do the Common Core State Standards replace classic literature with informational text?

Again, local school districts have complete authority in determining what curriculum is taught in order to meet the CCSS. Literature and literary skills are still an invaluable component of the curriculum. Because students need to demonstrate proficiency in reading non-fiction including technical writing in order to be college and career ready, a gradual change in emphasis occurs between fiction and non-fiction from the early grades to high school. This is illustrated in the suggested distribution of literary and informational passages from 4th grade to 12th grade. In 4th grade, there is a 50%-50% distribution

between literary and informational passages. While in 12th grade there is a 30%-70% distribution. It is important to point out that these percentages reflect the sum of student reading, not just reading in the English/Language Arts settings. Teachers of senior English classes, for example, are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts. Rather, 70 percent of student reading across all subject areas should be informational.

How have the Common Core State Standards impacted the curriculum, instruction and assessment in Germantown Hills School District?

As you are aware, this year Germantown Hills School District implemented a new math textbook series that is aligned to the CCSS. This year, our teachers are creating English/Language Arts Units that are aligned with the CCSS. Teachers are creating their own assessments to gauge student proficiency in meeting the CCSS throughout the year. Our District has also implemented the Measures of Academic Progress, which assess student achievement against the CCSS.

Any time we implement something new, we experience what we call an “implementation dip” This may or may not mean a slight shift in the grades your student is accustomed to earning. Be assured that we are continually monitoring our implementation process as well as students’ performance against these new standards. We are also working to provide ongoing support for students as well as teachers throughout this process.

How can I get more information on the Common Core State Standards?

The Common Core State Standards in their entirety may be found on the Germantown Hills School District website or by going to www.corestandards.org. You may also contact Superintendent Dan Mair at 383-2121 or dmair@ghills69.com.