



## LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

Iowa Department of Education

# The Iowa Core

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### → What is it?

The Iowa Core is the state's roadmap for what students are expected to learn from preschool through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. These state standards set common expectations, but leave decisions about teaching and lesson plans up to local schools and teachers.

Clear, consistent education standards provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live. They also reflect real-world knowledge and skills that students need to graduate from high school prepared to go to college or to enter the workforce.

Iowa was the last state in the nation to adopt statewide standards in 2008. State legislators led this shift away from locally determined standards, which had caused inconsistent expectations in schools across the state. Iowa educators identified and wrote the essential concepts and skills that make up the Iowa Core in literacy, math, science, social studies, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills (civic literacy, financial literacy, technology literacy, health literacy, and employability skills).

As the state worked to develop and implement the Iowa Core, a consortium of states across the nation formed to develop common standards. The Common Core State Standards Initiative was a state-led effort to establish consistent and clear standards for English-language arts and mathematics.

Forty-five states adopted these standards through an initiative launched by governors and school chiefs.

### **Iowa Core and Common Core**

- In 2008, state legislators adopted the Iowa Core standards for literacy, math, science, social studies, and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills, such as civic literacy.
- In 2010, Iowa merged state standards in English-language arts and mathematics with the Common Core State Standards, a state-led initiative spearheaded by governors and school chiefs.

In 2010, with the State Board of Education's approval, Iowa merged state standards in English-language arts and mathematics with the Common Core State Standards.

The State Board of Education's authority is provided by Iowa Code Chapter 256.7(26).

The Iowa Core standards weave together fundamental learning with high-level problem-solving and creative thinking. The idea is that students shouldn't be expected simply to understand subject matter; they should be able to apply what they've learned. This is important in a new economy that demands innovation, collaboration, and critical-thinking skills.

### **What the Iowa Core IS...**

- A roadmap providing Iowa students, parents, and teachers with a clear, common understanding of what students are expected to learn at every grade level.
- Standards that establish what Iowa students need to learn, but not how to teach. Teachers continue to create lesson plans and tailor instruction to fit the needs of their students.

### **What the Iowa Core IS NOT...**

- A federally driven initiative to force all schools to teach the same lesson plans, use the same textbooks, or to undermine the creativity of Iowa's teaching professionals.



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## ➔ What's different with the standards?

The expectations set by the Iowa Core are internationally benchmarked to the world's top-performing nations.

### Shifts in Mathematics

The mathematics standards emphasize not only procedural skills, but also conceptual understanding to make sure students absorb the critical information they need to succeed at higher levels. This is a shift from the current practices by which many students learn enough to get by on the next test, but forget it shortly thereafter, only to review it again the following year.

- 1) Focus: Deep focus on 2-4 critical areas at each grade level.
- 2) Coherence: Concepts are logically connected from one grade level to the next and linked to other major topics within the grade level.
- 3) Rigor: Fluency with arithmetic, application of knowledge to real-world situations, and deep understanding of mathematical concepts.

### Shifts in English-Language Arts

The standards establish a staircase of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also cover writing, speaking and listening, language use, and media and technology skills.

- 1) Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction and informational texts in addition to literature.
- 2) Reading and writing are grounded in evidence from the text.
- 3) Regular practice with complex text and its academic vocabulary (words such as "commit" and "synthesize").

## ➔ Where does it stand today?

Iowa Core implementation is a multi-year process led locally by schools and school districts with assistance from the Iowa Department of Education and Area Education Agencies. With professional development, schools continue to address how the standards fit with academic content, teaching, and local assessments. This process will continue well beyond the legislatively mandated deadlines for full implementation, which are the 2012-13 school year for high schools and 2014-15 for kindergarten through eighth grades.

## ➔ How is it funded?

The Iowa Department of Education has a \$1 million budget to support the work of Iowa Core implementation. No department positions are funded through Iowa Core dollars. Nearly 85 percent of this funding is sent directly to the AEAs to hire consultants who provide direct support to schools. These services are particularly critical in small or rural schools that may lack implementation resources. The funding also will support statewide implementation of effective literacy practices. The remaining 15 percent of funding supports state leadership teams that develop resources and tools for schools. This work includes teacher preparation and competency-based education, through which students earn credit and advance to the next level based on their mastery of content rather than their age or seat time.

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