

The Common Core State Standards in the Ballston Spa Central School District

The Common Core Standards were released in 2010 by the National Governors Association and were adopted by New York State in that same year. They set forth expectations for every grade level (K-12) in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics and outline changes in the classroom (also called “instructional shifts”) for both subjects. With a focus on preparing students for college and careers, the Common Core Standards support the district’s vision for a quality, rigorous education for all students. Upon their release, educators in the district began analyzing these standards and making the changes necessary to integrate them.

Across Our District Professional Development

Teachers and Teaching Assistants have taken advantage of numerous in-person and online professional development opportunities related to the Common Core Standards. Among them are sessions which explain Common Core’s classroom “shifts”, practice breaking down the standards to reveal the skills students need and the content students need to know, and provide guidance in assessing student progress on the new standards. At faculty and department meetings, administrators provide information and updates related to the standards as well.

Curricular Changes

Teachers have found innovative ways to weave the Common Core Standards into their instruction. At some grade levels, teachers have worked together to make new units which focus on teaching and assessing the standards. At other grade levels, teachers have revamped areas of their instruction (writing, for example) to better meet the demands of the standards.

Collaboration

Ideas about how to promote the standards and meet student needs are consistently shared between teachers and at committee or faculty meetings.

Examples from Our Classrooms

Bringing the Standards to Life

Students in one Kindergarten class love to celebrate “Nonfiction Friday”. Their teacher begins their morning meeting with a “Did you ever wonder...?” question. She chooses a different topic for the students to ponder each week based on the book they are reading that Friday morning. Later, of course, they also discuss the information they have learned from the books. Throughout the day, students work with nonfiction books in centers and read a nonfiction book to their teacher. As they read, she focuses on skills and concepts from the Common Core Standards to monitor students’ progress. Posters in the classroom explain the characteristics of fiction and nonfiction books. As students review books they have read, they use these posters to make decisions about the genre of books. “Nonfiction Friday” has fostered a love of nonfiction reading in these Kindergarten students.

The Shifts in Action

In a third grade classroom, students keep math journals to explain the thought process behind the math they do, explain what they have learned, and document what they want to know more about. They even write pen pal letters to explain math concepts to others. The students sit in groups that are each named after a different math concept (and their names will change to include concepts from different content areas throughout the year, too). That teacher has created math problems and activities related to Common Core’s six “instructional shifts” in math. Students typically do these problems on their own time, after they have finished their work, or for fun.

Highlighting Progress and Making Goals

A reading teacher uses a “fluency rubric” to monitor student reading. She adapted the same rubric so her students could read and understand it. In her class, students work with a partner and use a tape recorder to record their reading. When they play the tape back, they refer to the rubric, encourage one another, discuss what they did well, how they have improved, and what they would still like to work on.

Presenting Knowledge

In classrooms of all grade levels, students present their knowledge in various, engaging ways. For example, one class put a main character on trial. Both the defense and prosecution used evidence from the reading to support their arguments for the character’s guilt or innocence. In an upcoming “living museum” students will play the part of a historical character to educate others about the character’s life and contributions.

The Common Core Standards: Information for Ballston Spa Parents

What specifically are the Common Core Standards?

The Common Core Standards are a set of expectations for each grade level (K-12) in English Language Arts and Mathematics. They are focused on college and career preparedness and were written in consideration of what today’s student needs to know, and be able to do, to be successful beyond high school. Teachers are expected to make changes to their instruction to support the standards. These changes are called instructional shifts and there are six shifts for ELA and six for Mathematics.

How will the Common Core Standards affect students?

Through the Common Core Standards, educators hope to enrich our vision of a challenging, rigorous education for all students. In classrooms, teachers are ensuring that they meet the demands of Common Core’s instructional shifts.

In English Language Arts, this means students will:

- Read a balance of fiction and nonfiction text
- Learn about the world and other content areas through reading
- Read texts that are challenging and promote their growth as readers
- Use information from text to support their ideas, answers, and arguments
- Use and refer to sources of information in their writing
- Continuously build vocabulary related to every content area

In Mathematics, students will:

- Focus on completely understanding math concepts
- Build upon their knowledge of math concepts from year to year
- Frequently practice math facts to memorize key concepts and functions
- Understand many ways to solve mathematical problems
- Apply math to real world problems
- Practice, practice, practice – so they not only know their math facts but know when and how to apply them to a variety of math problems

How Can Parents Help?

The “Parent Resources” section of our website (www.bscsd.org) includes Common Core information and links for parents. There, you will find more information about the standards and what you can do to support your child. For example, Scholastic recently created a Common Core site for parents and included five simple yet effective ways to support these standards at home:

1. Talk about books, especially the great ones.
2. Ask your children questions about what they are reading.
3. Push kids to read nonfiction.
4. Encourage your kids to write, write, write.
5. Talk math with your kids.

The district will host a **Common Core Information Night** on February 27th from 6:30-8:00 pm at Milton Terrace North Elementary School for all parents and interested community members to attend. Please visit the school district website and the **Common Core Information and Resources** section for sample questions and grade level information for parents. For additional questions or concerns, please contact Mrs. Valarie Karas, Coordinator of Common Core Standards, at vkaras@bscsd.org, at 884-7210 x3459 or follow her on Twitter @ValarieJKaras.



Additional information and resources are available at:

www.bscsd.org Parent Resources

www.engageny.org Core Curriculum & Assessments