



## The Montana Common Core Standards Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: How did Montana make the decision to adopt the Common Core State Standards?**

A: The Montana Board of Public Education’s adoption of the Montana Common Core Standards (MCCS) was independent, voluntary and not required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) or any other federally-funded program.

As is the case with all of Montana’s content standards, before any decision was made regarding adoption, the MCCS were reviewed by educators and school administrators from across the state. Additionally, twelve public meetings about the standards were held over a two-year period.

Each state made its own decision about whether to adopt the standards. Montana took its time reviewing the standards in order to make sure they were right for Montana students. Our state was the last of 46 states to adopt the standards through a vote of the Montana Board of Public Education on November 4, 2011.

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### **Q: How were the new standards developed?**

A: States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers, and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core was developed by building on the best state standards in the United States; examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world; and carefully studying the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college, career, and life.

In English Language Arts and Literacy, the standards build on the firm foundation of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Frameworks in Reading and Writing, which draw on extensive scholarly research and evidence.

In mathematics, the standards draw on conclusions from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and other studies of high-performing countries that traditional mathematics curriculum in the United States must become substantially more coherent and focused in order to improve student achievement; addressing the problem that curriculum is “a mile wide and an inch deep.”

**Q: How will the Montana Common Core Standards affect curriculum in Montana schools?**

A: The MCCS are not a curriculum. They are a set of clear, shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills students need to master at each grade level. Additionally, Montana has integrated learning about the distinct and unique heritage and contributions of American Indians into its standards.

Montana's state constitution leaves curriculum development to local school districts, and locally-elected school boards set curriculum at the local level. As a result, local teachers, principals, superintendents, and school boards will decide on the curriculum needed to meet the new standards. Teachers are free to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms.

In response to requests from local school districts, the OPI provides examples of curricular materials that are aligned with the new academic standards. However, the authority to select curriculum remains up to each local school district and not with the state or federal government.

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**Q: How do the new Montana Common Core Standards compare to the previous state standards in English Language Arts and mathematics?**

A: The new standards set rigorous benchmarks at every grade level, to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, will graduate prepared for college and careers. Colleges and universities, as well as the business community, have told us that students who master these standards will be prepared for postsecondary education and the workforce. This is critical as we work to reduce Montana's college remediation rates and ensure our students have the knowledge and skills required in today's workplace.

When Montana's previous standards were compared by independent evaluators to the new Montana Common Core Standards, the new standards were found to be higher, clearer, and more rigorous than our previous English and math standards. Our previous standards only provided benchmark goals for 4th grade, 8th grade, and upon graduation. These new grade by grade standards are an improved tool to measure progress not only for teachers, but for parents and students.

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**Q: How do the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?**

The standards impact teachers by:

- Providing them with consistent goals and benchmarks to ensure students are progressing on a path for success in college, career, and life;
- Providing them with consistent expectations for students who move into their districts and classrooms from other states;
- Providing them the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across the country as they develop curricula, materials, and assessments linked to high-quality standards; and
- Helping colleges and professional development programs better prepare teachers.

**Q: How do the new standards address skills and content knowledge?**

A: The standards recognize that both content and skills are important.

In English Language Arts and Literacy, the Montana Common Core Standards require certain critical content for all students, including: classic myths and stories from around the world; America's founding documents; foundational American literature; and Shakespeare. In addition to content coverage, the standards require that students systematically acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Montana's Indian Education for All resources provide for inclusion of rich content that specifically supports the constitutional provision for all Montanans to learn about the unique cultural heritage of our state.

In mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Taken together, these elements support a student's ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures.

The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The standards set a rigorous definition of college and career readiness, not by piling topic upon topic, but by demanding that students develop a depth of understanding and ability to apply mathematics to new situations.

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**Q: How do the new standards determine appropriate reading material at each grade level?**

A: Evidence shows that the complexity of texts students are reading today does not match what is required 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 Montana Common Core 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.

The new standards require knowledge of both non-fiction and fiction, including classic myths, American literature, Shakespeare, our foundational documents, as well as literature from around the world. In addition to content coverage, the new standards require that students acquire knowledge in literature and other disciplines through reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Appropriately, the crucial decisions about what content should be taught are left to local schools.

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**Q: Do the English language arts standards include a required reading list?**

A: No. The Common Core State Standards include sample texts that demonstrate the level of text complexity appropriate for the grade level and compatible with the learning demands set out in the standards. The exemplars of high-quality texts at each grade level provide a rich set of possibilities. This ensures teachers have the flexibility to make their own decisions about what texts to use, while providing an excellent reference point when selecting their texts.

**Q: How will the new standards affect annual state testing in English language arts and math?**

A: The adoption of new English and math standards does not affect the requirement for the state assessment. The only assessment required of schools is an annual summative test, which is required by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). ESEA was most recently reauthorized in 2001 and is generally referred to as No Child Left Behind. The annual assessment in mathematics and English language arts takes place in grades 3-8 and once in high school.

Just as our previous state assessment measured students' performance on our previous English and math standards, a new assessment is being developed to measure students' performance on the new standards. Montana has joined with more than 20 states in developing a new assessment with the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) (SBAC). The Smarter Balanced assessment is an online, computer adaptive year-end assessment where each student's test is customized based on his or her performance throughout the test.

Smarter Balanced offers significant improvements over tests of the past, including new types of questions and performance tasks that require students to apply a variety of skills to complete complex tasks that will prepare them for college and the workplace.

The new assessment will be used for state and federal accountability purposes beginning in the 2014-2015 school year.

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**Q: Do the new standards and assessments require any additional data collection?**

A: The Office of Public Instruction only collects data that is required by state and/or federal law. The adoption of the Montana Common Core Standards and the use of the Smarter Balanced assessments do not alter any of the current data collection requirements in state or federal law.

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Refinery Manager

February 18, 2015

**ExxonMobil**  
*Refining & Supply*

Rep. Sarah Laszloffy  
Chair, Montana House Education Committee  
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Helena, MT 59620-0400  
[sarah.laszloffy@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.laszloffy@gmail.com)

Dear Chair Laszloffy:

I am writing to provide ExxonMobil's support for the continued adoption and full implementation of the Montana Common Core Standards. Nothing is more important than the education of our children, and we believe the Standards will help ensure Montana's students develop the skills and knowledge they need for success in college and in their careers.

ExxonMobil has a long history of supporting education. Since the Exxon and Mobil merger in 1999, we have invested more than \$1 billion in programs that focus on improving education. We know our business success ultimately depends on the education and expertise of our 75,000 employees – including those who live and work here in Montana.

Unfortunately, our nation is falling behind. On recent international tests, U.S. students ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in reading, 21<sup>st</sup> in science and 26<sup>th</sup> in math when compared to their counterparts from other countries. The Montana Common Core Standards structure K-12 education in such a way to identify and close these gaps, preparing our students to succeed in their post-secondary studies and the workplace. The Standards were internationally benchmarked with the world's top-performing nations, and they are aligned with college and employer expectations.

Another important point to keep in mind: The Standards are not curriculum. They simply lay out what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in both English and math. Curriculum decisions remain in the capable hands of the state board of education and local school districts across Montana. In other words, the Standards provide the what, not the how.

The world is a more demanding place than ever before. Employers and universities are expecting more, so primary and secondary schools must rise to the challenge and provide the knowledge and skills Montana's students will need to compete effectively in the global economy. ExxonMobil believes the Montana Common Core Standards will help ensure the K-12 students in our great state are prepared to meet those expectations, so I urge you and your committee to keep the Standards in place.

Sincerely,



Monica Mainland  
Manager, ExxonMobil Billings Refinery

cc: Members of the Montana House Education Committee

To: House Education Committee Members  
Re: HB 376 and HB 377

I am contacting the committee as someone who was an educator for 34 years. I taught 24 years at the high school level and the remainder with graduate students. I spent three years teaching in the Department of Defense Schools in Germany, and I am a recipient of the Montana Teacher of the Year Award for 1986.

I am one of the Teachers of the Year who all agreed that the Common Core Standards were vitally important to Montana. Why? Because they are what is best for our students. Common Core should not be a political issue. We should be focused on what's best for our children and how to prepare them to meet the challenges and opportunities of today's world.

As Montana's Commissioner for the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, I work to ensure that the sons and daughters of military families have equal opportunity and have access to all that Montana schools offer. I take this mandate seriously and am proud to be serve as commissioner.

I can truly say I am a firm believer that implementing Montana's Common Core Standards is the right way to go. Listen to those in the teaching profession. They know these standards are right for our students.

Respectfully,

Brigadier General Hal Stearns  
Retired Montana Commander of the Army National Guard.

February 17, 2015

Anne Keith  
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Bozeman, Montana 59718

Dear House Education Committee members,

I am a Bozeman teacher with 22 years of experience. I proudly served as the 2010 Montana Teacher of the Year, am Nationally Board Certified in Early Adolescent Mathematics and was honored with the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science. My husband and I are Montana natives and chose to raise our daughters in Montana to ensure they would receive a quality education.

Adoption of the Montana Common Core Standards has been one of the best things to happen to the Montana education community in my career. Montana educators are all working toward the same high standards for all our students. It doesn't matter if you live in Bozeman or Hysham, we expect all 3<sup>rd</sup> graders, for instance, to write at the same level of rigor and understand the same mathematical concepts to be successful in subsequent years. As I attend conferences and trainings for teachers, we are all working toward the same goals so we can collaborate and share ideas about the best instructional practices and share resources needed to help all Montana students succeed.

It's been a lot of hard work implementing the new standards. I was recently hired as an instructional coach in our elementary district, with supporting and helping teachers implement the Montana Common Core Standards as the main focus of my job. Recently, I helped a first grade teacher design an engineering unit which included the arts. We worked hard to use the standards as our base. We had to figure out how to scaffold the standards for some of her first graders who cannot read fluently yet. And we had to figure out how to get out of the way of students who were exceeding our expectations in their design challenges. The engagement level of those students was 100%. I also recently attended a third grade Invention Convention. As a result of an integrated unit of math, science and English language arts, the students had to apply their learning and create an invention and "pitch" their design in a persuasive speech. The designs were amazing and some could be patented. Who doesn't want a simple machine that pulls up your bed covers for you? Or a lift for old dogs to help them get on the couch?

In my school, our classroom engagement level is up. Our student enthusiasm is up. And our teacher enthusiasm is up. One colleague who has taught 30 years told me recently she's not contemplating retirement any more. She said this kind of teaching is why she went into teaching in the first place. It's been a lot of hard work. We're still figuring it out. But the results so far have been very rewarding.

The beauty of the Montana Common Core is we get to use our expertise as teachers to design lessons that engage OUR students in Bozeman. These lessons look different than those being taught in Hysham, because each Montana teacher is designing their own lessons to meet the needs of the students in their classroom while also meeting the standards.

It all comes down to relationships. We have to know our students. We have to know what they are passionate about, what their interests are, find their unique talents and let them shine. We have to design learning outside of the walls of our classroom and help our students make the world a better place. We have to know our communities and how we can partner with agencies. We have to use our expertise as teachers to create learning that will work for OUR students. The flexibility to do this work is alive and well in our classrooms.

Doing anything well takes time. We are not “done” implementing the standards in Bozeman. In fact, we continue every day to learn and grow and hold conversations around how we can best meet each child’s needs.

The best way for you to see what I’m talking about is to spend time in a public school. I invite all of you to come spend a day with me in Bozeman. You can see the standards in action and speak to teachers about the growth they’ve seen in their students over the last few years. Every teacher I work with is committed to continuing to learn how to support students on their educational journey.

The Montana Common Core Standards have raised the bar of our expectations of students, and students are rising to the challenge. Please allow us to continue on this upward trajectory of excellence in our classrooms.

Sincerely,

*Anne Keith*  
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## **22 Montana Teachers of the Year Support Montana Common Core Standards**

As Montana Teachers of the Year, our lifework has been dedicated to engaging Montana students in learning experiences that prepare them for the challenges and opportunities of the future — as individuals at home, work, service and play and as members of local, state, national and international communities pursuing the common good.

We proudly reflect the good work that some 10,000 Montana teachers do every day and every Collectively, the 22 of us have more than 500 years of teaching experience. We've taught at the elementary, middle, high school, college and graduate school levels in Montana. We teach English, math, language arts, social studies, science and other subjects, but mainly we teach kids. Our experience has taught us that Montana's students are best served when:

- The expectations of the state are expressed in relevant and rigorous standards.
- Local communities, relying on local teachers' professional expertise, map out a sequence of courses and course curricula that meet those standards within the context of community values.
- Classroom teachers have the latitude to design learning experiences that challenge, excite and intrigue students as teachers deliver the community-approved curriculum aligned with state-approved standards.
- In our classrooms, schools and communities, all students feel respected for who they are and are encouraged to explore what they could be.

Standards in all professions change over time. As individual professionals, we have watched Montana's Board of Public Education adopt new accreditation standards throughout our careers. We have watched the development of Montana's Common Core Standards for English language arts and mathematics. We have never connected with one another to weigh in on them collectively. We do so now to say this: We support Montana's Common Core Standards. Here's why:

- Montana's Common Core Standards are more rigorous, more specific and more comprehensive than the standards they replace.
- Montana's Common Core Standards prepare students to make smooth transitions into colleges, careers and citizenship.
- Montana's Common Core Standards help kids who move out of Montana or kids who move into Montana enter their new school with the skills and knowledge they'll need to stay at grade level.
- Montana's Common Core Standards honor Montana's long-held tradition of local control of our public schools, as well as our constitutional and statutory obligations to understand, recognize and preserve the cultural heritage of Montana's American Indians.
- Montana's Common Core Standards infuse English and math competencies into other subject areas, just as processing information, solving problems and communication are infused in all aspects of adult life in the 21st century.

- Most importantly, Montana's Common Core Standards specifically establish goals that guide teachers in their design of instruction without limiting their professional judgment in how to deliver it.

Implementing Montana's Common Core Standards will require much of Montana teachers. We'll need to develop new skills, design new learning experiences and ensure that assessments play a relevant, but appropriate role in students' learning experiences. We know that Montana teachers are up to the task and that our students and our state will be better for our efforts.

The following Montana Teachers of the Year concur in this statement:

2014 Anna Baldwin – Arlee  
2013 Eileen Sheehy – Billings  
2012 Tom Pederson – Helena  
2011 Paul Anderson – Bozeman  
2010 Anne Keith – Bozeman  
2009 Sally Broughton - Bozeman  
2008 Steve Gardiner – Billings  
2007 Gary Carmichael – Whitefish  
2006 Debi Biegel – Bozeman  
2005 Mary Wren – Great Falls  
2004 Alyson Mike – East Helena  
2003 Jon Runnalls – Helena  
2002 Judie Woodhouse – Polson  
1999 Terry Beaver – Helena  
1998 Patty Myers – Great Falls  
1997 Kim Girard – Glasgow  
1994 Kay Brost – Broadus  
1992 Nancy Stucky – Billings  
1987 Mary Moe – Columbia Falls  
1986 Hal Stearns – Missoula  
1984 Ken Price – Helena  
1972 Jack Johnson.- Billings