

Top 10 FAQs on K-12 Implementation of Common Core

1) How does text complexity relate to Kinder and 1st grade? How does text complexity relate to their classroom instruction?

A. The Common Core State Standards do not raise reading difficulty for beginning readers (K-1). However, teachers will be reading more challenging books to beginning readers and asking probing, text-dependent questions to get their students ready for aspects of the Common Core. Teachers of K-1 students need to ensure that their students develop strong reading and writing skills (e.g., phonological awareness, decoding, fluency, comprehension), are engaged in collaborative conversations and demonstrate complex thinking to support their ability to independently take on complex texts in the later grades.

2) Q. How do students' instructional levels affect the implications of teaching complex texts? What do we do with students who are 2-3 years below grade level for whom a piece of text may be at their frustration level?

A. One of the foundational tenets of the Common Core is common expectations for all students. Part of our work with Quality Teaching for English Learners (QTEL) and the development of our theoretical framework for English Learners are based on the principles of sustaining academic rigor and holding high expectations for our students. We believe that we can do both by engaging students in meaningful interactions with high levels of instructional scaffolds. These scaffolds are a dynamic and responsive process that changes over time to allow students to access complex text and rigorous tasks. Teachers can provide this strategic support by asking probing questions, clarifying misunderstandings, and implementing additional scaffolds. This work is supported through our text complexity professional development module and next year's professional development module on collaborative conversations.

In the units of study, teachers will see the use of "Preparing the Learner" lessons, which are designed to support students in accessing complex texts and tasks. The Preparing the Learner lessons activate relevant prior knowledge, focus students' attention on key concepts that they will explore in the text, and introduce key terms in a meaningful context. In addition, within the units of study, the teachers will linger longer on texts to provide time for companion texts, ample scaffolding, critical thinking and answering of text dependent questions.

3) Q. What if a teacher can't attend the pullout or afterschool unit of study training because of prior commitments?

A. For teachers that cannot attend the designated professional development for their unit of study, there will be make-up sessions that the teachers can attend with either CLAS teachers or curriculum specialists. Due to the significant change in pedagogical practices, it will be crucial that all teachers be trained prior to implementing the units of study to ensure effective implementation and understanding of the instructional shifts.

4) Q. Will teachers be able to remove stories out of the core curriculum to cover other stories within the theme more deeply (i.e. close reading, analytic writing)?

A. Yes, during the summer, teachers serving on the unit writing teams will be trained and will work together to analyze the text selections using the dimensions of text complexity and the CCSS-ELA. The group will make recommendations as to which selections best fit the learning objectives and which stories can be removed. By removing some of the stories, teachers will be able to engage students in close reading of specific texts, increase collaborative conversations between students, and amplify the amount of writing done in the classroom. The teams' recommendations and options will be incorporated into the curriculum maps for the 2013-2014 school year along with the scope and sequence of foundational skills that still must be incorporated weekly.

5) Q. Will the common core lesson unit plans replace lesson plans next year for teachers?

A. Yes, the units of study will replace current instruction during the identified time period as it did this year. The changes will be noted on the curriculum maps (pacing guides) developed by the summer writing teams.

6) Q. Will all teachers be expected to write Common Core units of study like the ones being developed by the writing teams?

A. No, teachers on the writing teams are provided additional professional development to ensure the ability to write units of study that are consistent with our theoretical framework and our identified instructional shifts. We encourage any teacher that would like to be part of the process to join the summer development team.

7) Q. Can teachers start creating units on their own integrating their textbooks in ELA, History, Science and Math?

A. The unit of study writing process is a very complex and iterative process that takes weeks to develop. Each unit of study moves through an evaluative process based on our established rubric and is reviewed by our national partners to ensure the production of high quality materials. Due to the complexity of this process, we are forming grade level/course alike teams of enthusiastic teachers that will work together to create our units of study. The next set of units of study will be developed during the summer.

8) How can I become involved in summer unit of study writing and assessment teams?

A. If teachers would like to be part of the writing teams during the summer, they are encouraged to apply during the window of interest, which opened March 4 and will remain open until April 1, 2013. Interest forms are available through the CLAS teachers or through the Staff Development website as of March 1, 2013. All interest forms should be submitted to Maria Abundiz in the Staff Development Office by April 1, 2013.

9) Q. Are assessments included in the units of study?

A. Yes, each unit of study begins with a pre-assessment and ends with a performance-based assessment. Throughout the units of study, the students demonstrate their learning through formative assessments including partner/group work during collaborative conversations, writing prompts, reflection journals, exit slips, and warm-up activities.

10) Q. Will the Common Core lesson plan template be used by all teachers next year?

A. The Common Core lesson plan was designed to highlight the key instructional shifts found in the Common Core State Standards. After finishing the unit of study, teachers are encouraged to analyze the Common Core lesson plan template and identify elements that they need to include or remove from their current lesson plans to reflect the instructional shifts in their daily instruction.