What Parents Need to Know About the Common Core State Standards  
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(Commentary for Md PTA newsletter)

Educators and parents want the same thing for students. We want all children to be successful throughout their education, so they are fully prepared for college and a career. That is why the more rigorous Common Core State Standards are being fully implemented in all Maryland schools during the 2013-14 school year.

Developed under the leadership of the National Governor’s Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Common Core initiative has brought together the best and brightest educators, policy makers, business leaders, and parents to determine what students need to know to be ready for life beyond high school. Maryland, along with 44 other states and the District of Columbia, adopted the Common Core State Standards to ensure that students will graduate from our schools ready for their next step.

Maryland is ready for this important shift. Thousands of teachers, principals, and administrators from across the State have been preparing for the past three years to deliver these standards to your children. Some local school systems and schools have already made the full transition, and we’re pleased with the reports.

National PTA has been a strong supporter of the Common Core. It produced the “Parents’ Guide to Student Success,” which provides an overview of what children will learn by the end of each grade (from kindergarten through high school) in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. The Guide focuses on the key skills your child will learn in these subjects, which will build a strong foundation for success in other content areas studied throughout the school year. The Parents’ Guide can be found at: www.pta.org/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2909.

Maryland PTA has also been a key partner, providing valuable input on the Maryland State Department of Education’s new handout, “Top Ten Things Parents Needs to Know about the Common Core State Standards.” The “Top Ten” and additional parent resources can be found at www.marylandpublicschools.org/MSDE/programs/ccss/ccssip_e.

With the Common Core fully implemented in Maryland schools starting this fall, what changes will be coming to your child’s classroom? Younger students will likely see little difference in instruction. However, topics may be covered at different grade levels than they have been in the past. In mathematics, a greater emphasis will be placed on basic arithmetic skills, until students have fully mastered the content. Reading will include more authentic texts and non-fiction works, giving students the opportunity to learn to analyze and understand real-world documents in addition to literary fiction. These mathematics and reading skills will help your
children to excel in all subjects, with an emphasis on practical applications for what they are learning. Learning through the use of real-world problems and texts will help students develop the problem-solving and critical thinking skills they will need to be successful as they move forward.

Students in middle and high school will see a greater emphasis placed on informational texts and drawing conclusions from textual evidence. Your children will work to enlarge their vocabulary through reading more complex texts. These skills translate to college and workforce literacy expectations.

All too often, students entering community colleges and universities must take remedial courses to re-learn the skills they should have mastered in high school. The educational shifts in literacy and mathematics that the Common Core State Standards calls for are designed to better prepare our students to excel upon entering post-secondary education.

As standards become more rigorous, your children will need your support more than ever. As an involved parent, please reach out to your student’s teachers to learn how you can help your child succeed. I thank you for your support as we work together on behalf of all students.