Your Child and the Common Core State Standards
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Commentary for School newsletters

As our children head back to school across Maryland, we have all been preparing for some exciting changes in the classroom. This fall, we will be fully implementing the Common Core State Standards, along with 45 other states and the District of Columbia. Our teachers have been participating in staff development training and working hard for several years to effectively transition to these new academic standards. This summer, teams of teachers and principals from every public school attended the third year of training to prepare for this transition.

Why are we making this change? Frankly, the way we taught students in the past simply does not prepare them for the higher demands of college and careers. It is all about improving teaching and learning to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in college and the workplace. The Common Core State Standards are important because they will help all children – no matter who they are or where they live – learn the same skills. They create clear expectations for what your child should know and be able to do in key areas: reading, writing, speaking and listening, language, and mathematics. If you know what these expectations are, then you can work with the teacher to help your child succeed.

Let me give a few brief examples about what will be different this year as your child returns to school. Students will still learn similar content as in previous curricula, but the depth of understanding they achieve will be greater. In English/language arts (ELA), students will now read more non-fiction in each grade level. This will help your child learn about the world through reading. Your child will read challenging texts more closely so they can make sense of what they read and draw their own conclusions. When it comes to writing or retelling a story, students will use “evidence” gathered from the text to support what they say. In addition, your child will learn how to write from what they read.

In mathematics, your child will work more deeply in fewer topics, which will ensure full understanding. Starting with a strong foundation, students will keep building on learning year after year. Your child will spend time practicing and memorizing math facts, however they will also learn why the math works and be asked to talk about and show their understanding. Additionally, an emphasis will be placed on using math in real-world situations. These college and career ready shifts will serve as a foundation for students to develop higher-level thinking skills and to understand and analyze complex texts and mathematical problems.

I am confident in the benefits of the Common Core. Your child’s school continues to plan the day-to-day instruction of students, but these standards will serve as a guide to determine what level of knowledge each grade level should contain. The Common Core simply frames what skills every student should master before graduating from high school. In this way, these new academic standards will ensure that every student in Maryland public schools is prepared for their next step.
Parents play an important role in reaching these next steps. We ask that you support your child by engaging with their lessons. Set high expectations for your children and see that they achieve them. Encourage more reading at home and take field trips to the library. Provide your child with both fiction and non-fiction books. Ask your child to provide evidence and reasoning as to why they should receive more allowance. Have students write about their reasoning. Reinforce mathematical concepts with your children as you have done in the past, but ask your child to provide explanations rather than rote memorizations. Take your children to the grocery store and ask them to help you to do math in real-life situations. Help students make connections between their lessons and realistic scenarios. These steps can help to reinforce what your child learns in their classes. Education is a continuous process, and not one that is restricted to a classroom.

I thank you for your support of our students, teachers, and administrators during this period of transition. A variety of resources about the Common Core State Standards can be found at MarylandPublicSchools.org and I encourage you to engage with your child’s educators for specific ways to help your student succeed.