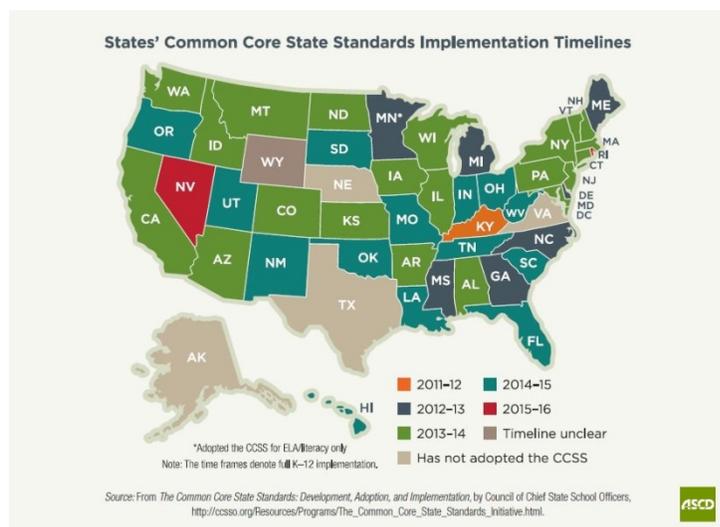


## Implementing Common Core: How Will it Affect Your Bottom Line?

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Little has stirred such *nationwide* debate on education like the Common Core State Standards, the first-ever attempt to set nationwide standards for K-12 education. As American students have fallen behind their international counterparts, as achievement gaps have grown domestically, and as employers and colleges have increasingly cited a lack of preparedness from graduates, the product of this decades-long debate became the Common Core State Standards. These standards were created and are championed



by teachers, researchers, leaders in higher education, business leaders, and politicians. The collaborative effort means the standards were created by the states and for the states, and, as such, have been adopted by forty-five states, the District of Columbia, and four territories. The hope is that these standards will be more robust than the state standards they replace because they focus on analysis, understanding, concepts, and skills more than specific content.

However, with these ambitious academic standards has come much disagreement about the standards themselves: how to implement them, how to assess them, and how to develop the tools that teachers need to teach them. Often lost in the debate is a fundamental question to most schools: How much will this all cost? The last thing school leaders want to do when funds are tight is overhaul curricula.

### Common Core Costs: Initial Investments May Lead to Long-term Savings

As with any new venture, there are some folks saying that it is cost neutral, while others see it as a new, poorly funded government mandate. Those arriving at cost neutrality cite that since schools already receive funding for instructional materials, technology, and professional development, any new Common Core related expenditures will just replace costs that already exist in school budgets. While there is certainly truth to the idea that some new expenses will replace old ones, others see the current funding as unable to support the cost of the new materials and the intense immediate investment required to bring teachers and classroom technology up to speed. The truth, as is usually the case with debates like these, likely lies somewhere in the middle.

At the core of the financial debate are two types of costs: implementation and operating. *Implementation* costs include purchasing all new instructional materials aligned to Common Core standards, professional development for teachers to help teach these standards, and the technology needed to teach and test them. *Operating* costs will include those curricula-related expenses that

schools already see each year, such as updating instructional materials, ongoing professional development, and replacing obsolete technology. Because these operating costs are ones that schools would incur regardless of new standards, we don't foresee a net increase in these costs. Essentially all of a school's prior spending on instructional materials, professional development, and technology will now be spent toward Common Core. Cost *savings* may even be possible, as opportunities for economies of scale develop between states from the "commonness" of Common Core and as the potential for efficiencies develops from increased technology usage, such as open source materials and the ability to inexpensively update electronic textbooks.

Naturally, there are outliers in the way schools and districts are choosing to implement, like the much-publicized \$1 billion iPad initiative made by Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). While that initial dollar amount elicits a certain amount of sticker shock, considering the fact that LAUSD is the largest school district in the state and the second largest in the country, their *implementation* costs will



be high. However; considering the finite lifespan of something like an iPad, costs related to the updating and/or replacing of technology are categorized as *operating*. That said, cost savings can still be realized in areas like curriculum updates. Updating an electronic textbook will likely be more cost effective than updating its hardbound equivalent.

Unfortunately, the *implementation* costs do not have the same potential for net savings as the operating costs. Schools, however, do have the ability to tailor their implementation plan and costs to their needs and budget. These costs will include initial or one-time expenses that are required to make the shift to the new standards. Some may extend past Year One, but are still one-time in nature and solely for the transition to the new standards. For example, implementation costs include the purchase of new math textbooks and instructional materials that are required to align curriculum with Common Core, but purchases of materials in subsequent years to keep texts up-to-date are operating costs.

Effective implementation will depend on each individual school's current situation and how quickly it wants to implement the full intention of the standards. The main implementation costs can be broken down into three key categories:

- Instructional Materials
- Technology
- Professional Development

The true cost of implementing Common Core will come down to how quickly a school embraces the shift to Common Core and its ancillary supports. On one end of the spectrum, a school could fulfill the letter of the law but not the intent of the new standards by keeping primarily hard-copy textbooks, once-per-year paper testing, and not engaging in meaningful professional development on the new standards. A full embrace of the new standards means revitalizing classroom instruction in a meaningful and enduring way with greater integrated technology for curriculum, testing (including interim tests), and professional development.

## Instructional Materials

We have heard more than one school director quip that those who stand to benefit the most from new standards are textbook companies. If schools have not been slowly phasing in materials aligned with Common Core, those companies do indeed stand to gain. However, the market for instructional materials is constantly changing, and this move to Common Core may actually be the impetus to capitalize on those changes. Some of the change is technological, as electronic devices replace traditional paper textbooks. Some of the change is simply the expansion of the marketplace for content providers, as they will no longer focus disproportionately on a few large states. With greater competition among large providers, and the potential for niche providers to reach new markets and reach economies of scale, schools stand to potentially gain pricing power. Common standards also mean greater potential for open-sourced instructional materials, which are minimal in cost and can be quickly and easily updated when needed. Organizations like OER Commons are providing Open Education Resources (OER), teaching and learning materials freely available for all to use. These include full courses, modules, syllabi, lectures, homework assignments, quizzes, lab activities, pedagogical materials, games, simulations, and many more resources contained in digital media collections from around the world.<sup>1</sup>OERs may also engage teachers more fully in curricula, allowing them to more easily adapt and differentiate instructional materials for their students. Depending on the extent to which schools incorporate Open Education Resources, the Fordham Institute estimated that the instructional materials element of implementation could cost schools as low as \$20 per student to as high as \$135 per student.<sup>2</sup>

## Technology

The biggest change for most schools will be the transition to a greater reliance on technology. Depending on a school's current technology infrastructure, this change also comes with the largest price tag. Computer Adaptive Testing is facing stiff opposition in many states, but California has affirmed its intent to roll out computerized testing in the 2014-15 school year, with field testing scheduled for spring of this school year. However, with the option to administer tests with paper and pencil for the first three years for those schools lacking computers or internet capacity, a school is not pressed to invest in technology immediately. In deciding how to allocate available funds, investing in technology may be a larger up-front hit, but it also has the potential to create cost savings going forward. Investing in technology infrastructure provides advantages beyond those associated with Common Core transition and implementation. In the end, while a school may use Common Core as the impetus to incur these new costs, the benefits of upgrading technology capacity extend far beyond those associated with transitioning to Common Core. Cost effective options exist in programs tailored for schools, like Google's "Chromebooks for Education" and Apple's "Apple in Education." Additionally, EdTec is working to bring low cost hardware solutions to its partner schools.



Because each school's needs are unique, expenses for hardware can range from as little as \$200 per device to as much as \$2,000. To help navigate the requirements of technology needed for Common

<sup>1</sup><http://www.oercommons.org/learn-about-the-movement>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/putting-a-price-tag-on-the-common-core.html>

Core testing, resources, like those listed below, are available to calculate a school's needs, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### **Smarter Balanced Assessment Technology Requirements**

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/>

### **Smarter Balanced Assessment Technology Calculator**

<http://www3.cde.ca.gov/sbactechcalc/>

### **Professional Development**

Perhaps the most important piece to all of these new standards is for teachers to know how to best teach them. As they are asked to adjust their lesson plans and instructional methods, quality Professional Development (PD) will be essential. Full in-person trainings can cost from \$4,000 to \$10,000. However, the launch of the Common Core standards is creating a national PD marketplace that was previously fragmented by local standards. There is now an increased potential for **online** professional development and webinars. Online instruction can be an effective tool for providing customized professional development for individual educators. Tailored approaches can greatly improve the efficiency and relevance of professional development options by filling particular gaps in knowledge, and can also save costs and headaches associated with in-person, onsite delivery (including the expense of paying for substitutes, missed instructional time, etc.).



The larger marketplace may eventually drive down the costs of Professional Development training as education companies now invest in large scale PD delivery through technology platforms or online trainings. One of many examples is Insight Education's [myCore](#), which is a platform to allow teachers to develop Common Core aligned lesson plans. Also, non-profits are beginning to see an opportunity to assist a large number of students through Common Core-focused technology investments. Organizations like Achieve the Core<sup>[1]</sup> and ASCD<sup>[2]</sup> are already providing free online content designed to help educators. A school could also blend the two mediums and allow internal professional development workshops from select teachers who have attended/completed online Common Core professional development or those teachers who are performing at high levels in implementing the new standards. This would allow schools to further extend the reach of their most qualified teachers.

### **Assessments**

The subject of assessments could be included in the technology category, but it has caused enough worry among school leaders that it is broken out here. There are two challenges here for charter schools. The first is that the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which is tasked with creating assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards, is developing computer adaptive tests (CATs) for the summative assessment. The key word in that title is "computer", which means the charter school will need to make the hardware investment mentioned earlier.

<sup>[1]</sup> <http://www.achievethecore.org/>

<sup>[2]</sup> <http://www.ascd.org/professional-development/webinars/common-core-webinars.aspx>

The second challenge is how to prepare students to take a CAT and to assess their progress before the interim assessment. The Common Core will have new types of questions, delivered in a different method. This means that a school's current interim assessments will be out-of-date and investment will be needed to bring its assessments up to speed. For example, SBAC's plan is to have thousands of test items and tasks in an online "bank" from which teachers can draw in order to custom-design interim tests on specific standards. Also available will be a bank of "formative" tools and strategies to help them judge and monitor students' learning as they go along. The full suite of summative, interim, and formative assessments is estimated to cost \$27.30 per student.<sup>3</sup>

There are other options to invest in new questions with current student assessment systems. For example, EdTec's ZOOM! Data Source program provides assessment support for over 175 charter schools using DataDirector. DataDirector has already put the Common Core Standards into their system, which can be linked to questions in any assessments created. DataDirector has also created fixed forms that are pre-aligned benchmarks that use the Common Core Standards and are available for purchase. Another source of Common Core aligned items is Northwest Evaluation Association's MAP assessments on which CCSA has secured a volume discount.

### **In Conclusion, This is Just the Beginning**

As with everything relating to Common Core, there is a lot of uncertainty around the financial impact of the transition. We predict schools will incur one-time implementation costs over the next 6-18 months as technology investments need to be made to allow for online testing, professional development needs to occur to assist teachers with the transition, and new assessments must be created. The actual costs will be unique to the school and will depend on the way in which the standards are implemented in the near and long term. The decision by charter school leaders to either quickly shift to a new way of doing things or to only fix what is absolutely necessary for Common Core alignment will be greatly affected by the timing and the amount of expense. Schools should look at their current budget and plan accordingly.

While schools will likely incur expenses in implementing Common Core, in the long run, the shift to Common Core may bring down some operating expenses as the larger marketplace brings in more players and the investment in technology by schools allows for less expensive upgrading and information exchange. Finding innovative ways to tackle implementation and deliver instruction, as we have discussed in this article, should enable schools to reduce the overall impact to their bottom line. 🌱

*Additional Information from the CDE:*

To help offset transition costs, the CDE announced Common Core State Standards Implementation Funds in the amount of \$200 per prior year enrollment using CALPADS fall enrollment data as of October 2012 and certified on or before May 24, 2013.

These funds can be expended for any of the following purposes:

Professional development for teachers, administrators, and paraprofessional educators or other classified employees involved in the direct instruction of pupils that is aligned to the academic content standards adopted pursuant to California *Education Code*(*EC*) sections 60605.8, 60605.11, 60605.85, and 60811.3.

Instructional materials aligned to the academic content standards adopted pursuant to *EC* sections 60605.8, 60605.85, 60605.11, and 60811.3 including, but not limited to, supplemental instructional materials as provided in sections 60605.86, 60605.87, and 60605.88.

Integration of these academic content standards through technology-based instruction for purposes of improving the academic performance of pupils, including, but not necessarily limited to, expenditures necessary to support the administration of computer-based assessments and provide high-speed, high-bandwidth Internet connectivity for the purpose of administration of computer-based assessments.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/ca/commoncorefaq.asp>

*Are there conditions placed on local educational agencies (LEAs) seeking the CCSS implementation funds?*

As a condition of receiving CCSS implementation funds, a school district, county office of education, charter school, or state special school is required to:

Develop and adopt a plan delineating how the CCSS implementation funds will be spent. The plan must be explained in a public meeting of the governing board of the school district or county board of education, or governing body of the charter school, before its adoption in a subsequent public meeting.

On or before July 1, 2015, report detailed information to the California Department of Education (CDE), including, but not limited to, specific purchases made and the number of teachers, administrators, or paraprofessional educators that received professional development.

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/fq/aa/ca/commoncorefaq.asp>