

## Common Core State Standards: An Overview for Teachers of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

### Training Video Transcript

The Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment System is a new assessment designed to more validly measure what students with significant cognitive disabilities know and can do. This video will provide an introduction to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics for teachers who work with students with significant cognitive disabilities who will complete the alternate assessment.

This training, *The Common Core State Standards, An Overview for Teachers of Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities*, is the first in a series of training videos that will support teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities in their efforts to teach and assess. Sponsored by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education programs, this training is part of the professional development efforts of the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium.

The Common Core State Standards were designed to reflect and incorporate the best of existing state standards while reducing the overall number, making them clearer, and making them higher or more difficult. Unlike most standards that have existed in the past, the Common Core State Standards are anchored in our expectations for college and career readiness. Before beginning the process of writing standards for individual grade levels, the authors of the Common Core identified College and Career Readiness standards that serve as the targets for all students. Then, the authors worked backward, moving down the grade levels, to identify the grade specific standards that students had to achieve if they were to successfully achieve college and career readiness. All of this work was guided by international benchmarking and our ongoing need to maintain global competitiveness. In the end, the Common Core State Standards were written based on existing research and focus on rigorous content and the application of knowledge and skills.

In designing the Common Core State Standards, the authors made specific decisions regarding what they were NOT trying to accomplish. For example, the Common Core State Standards were not designed to tell teachers HOW to teach or to provide a comprehensive representation of what could or should be taught. Furthermore, the Standards do not define interventions or supports for students who are well above or below grade level, students who are English Language Learners or students with identified disabilities. Finally, the

Common Core State Standards were never intended to define everything that is required to be college and career ready.

The Common Core State Standards were developed to span kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with clearly articulated end-of-year expectations. This is important for those of us who teach students with significant cognitive disabilities because we are accustomed to thinking about mastery of carefully sequenced skills. Within a single grade level, the Common Core State Standards define where students should be at the end of the year, but they do not identify steps or increments along the way. That said, looking from one grade level to the next, the Common Core is developmentally appropriate and provides a cumulative progression of skills and understandings that students must learn and apply.

The English Language Arts Standards have a consistent structure from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

There are three main sections of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts. The first is the kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade section. It reflects the acquisition of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language skills across disciplines. Beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the Common Core makes a distinction between English Language Arts that focuses on the more sophisticated skills, understanding, and application across reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. In addition, there is a section of the Common Core State Standards that addresses Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects. This last section emphasizes the responsibility that content area teachers share with English Language Arts teachers in helping students achieve college and career readiness. There are also three appendices in the Common Core State Standards. These appendices provide valuable information to teachers of students with significant cognitive disabilities, especially those who teach in separate settings and may not have access to general education teachers to support their access to appropriate resources, materials, and expectations. Specifically, Appendix B offers lists of exemplar texts and sample tasks for each grade level band. While these are not mandated lists, they do give us a valuable place to start in building resources and supports for students with significant cognitive disabilities. For example, we already have a team of teachers and students authoring beginning level texts in [tarheelreader.org](http://tarheelreader.org) that will support students in accessing the exemplar texts listed in Appendix B.

The k-5 cross-disciplinary Standards in English Language Arts as well as the 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts standards all address 4 strands: The first is Reading, which includes Reading Literature, Reading Information Text, and in kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Foundational Reading skills. In addition, the 4 strands include Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. Together, these four strands support an integrated, balanced model of literacy. Importantly for students with significant cognitive disabilities who often struggle to develop language and communication skills, these areas are emphasized

throughout their school careers. Also important for this group of students who often require specialized learning media, materials and technology, these are integrated throughout rather than being dealt with as separate pieces of what's important as we are thinking about helping all students achieve college and career readiness.

The Common Core State Standards in Mathematics are structured differently than the English Language Arts standards.

The kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade Mathematics Standards are organized into domains. In kindergarten only, there are standards in a domain called Counting and Cardinality. While this domain is only included in kindergarten the skills and understandings developed here are applied across the grade levels. The other 4 domains for kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade there are: Operations and Algebraic Thinking, Numbers and Operations in Base 10, Measurement and Data, and Geometry.

In 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade a different set of Domains are addressed. They are: Ratios and Proportional Relationships, Number Systems, Expression and Equations, Geometry, and Statistics and Probability. From kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, teachers address all of the standards across these domains within any grade level.

In High School, the domains are slightly different because they are not linked to specific grade levels. Instead they focus on the domains of mathematics that are typically addressed in different high school mathematic courses. The specific high school domains are: Number and Quantity, Algebra, Functions, Modeling, Geometry, and Statistics and Probability.

The authors of the Common Core State Standards set out to create standards for all students. They intentionally chose not to try to identify or to specify specific interventions for students well above or below grade level. They chose not to describe the full range of supports required for students who are English language learners or have special needs, but that does not mean they didn't intend for the standards to apply to these students. There is one set of standards that apply to all students.

Our job is to create the system of instruction and supports that will allow all students to learn each year and achieve college and career readiness over time.

Thank you for your participation. To learn more about the Dynamic Learning Maps Alternate Assessment Consortium and the Alternate Assessment System, please go to [www.dynamiclearningmaps.org](http://www.dynamiclearningmaps.org)