

**Common Core State Standards and WWA Core Knowledge K-5 and 6-8
Combined Reports
Including a message from WWA Principal, Carole Bartusiak**

**How does the Core Knowledge Curriculum used by Woodrow Wilson
Academy align with the Common Core State Standards?
(Kindergarten through 5th Grade)**

**By
JoAnn Rasmussen
WWA Board of Directors**

What is Common Core?

The “Common Core State Standards” is sometimes shortened to the “Common Core” or CCSS.

The Common Core State Standards were created by a group of educators in 2010 and are a set of guidelines that serve as benchmarks for where students should be and what they should know by the time they reach the end of each grade level in school.

According to the official CCSS website, there are six main characteristics of these standards.

1. They are research- and evidence-based.
2. They are clear, understandable, and consistent.
3. They are aligned with college and career expectations.
4. They are based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills.
5. They are built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards.
6. They are informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society.

As of the completion of this report, 43 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have adopted the CCSS. The Colorado State Board of Education adopted the CCSS on August 2, 2010, with full implementation in the 2013-14 school year.

There are states and territories that have not adopted the Common Core State Standards, and they are Minnesota (which adopted the English Language Arts [ELA] portion only), Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas, Alaska, Indiana, Virginia, and Puerto Rico.

What are the major misconceptions about the Common Core State Standards?

The biggest misconception about the Common Core State Standards is the notion that it is a specific curriculum.

The CCSS is not a curriculum; it is a set of guidelines. Because the Common Core State Standards are broad and extensive, it's not feasible to include it with this report, but here are some examples:

For example, from the English Language Arts (ELA) 3rd Grade Standard:

- Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.
- Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.

For example, from the Math Standards In 3rd Grade, instructional time should focus on four areas:

- Developing understanding of multiplication and division and strategies for multiplication and division within 100
- Developing understanding of fractions, especially unit fractions (fractions with numerator 1)
- Developing understanding of the structure of rectangular arrays and of area
- Describing and analyzing two-dimensional shapes

The CCSS do not dictate a specific curriculum be used.

States can choose the best way to meet the standards, and charter schools like WWA can decide which curriculum best fits their needs. Woodrow Wilson Academy is in a unique position that allows us to be so close to this decision. That's one benefit of being a charter school.

Another misconception about the CCSS: The new standards are set too low or too high.

The Common Core State Standards are guidelines. States with standards higher than that of the CCSS do not need to lower their standards to comply. States with standards lower than that of the CCSS face a bigger challenge.

What does all this mean for Woodrow Wilson Academy?

In our Elementary School (WWA Kindergarten through 5th Grade), we live by the motto "Nurturing, Motivating, and Exciting Children to Learn." To do this, Woodrow Wilson Academy uses the following curricula: Core Knowledge, Saxon Math, Shurley Grammar, Treasures Reading, and Handwriting Without Tears.

At WWA, we already have experience with a rigorous set of standards by which we teach our children. According to the official website, The Core Knowledge Sequence:

provides a clear outline of content to be learned grade by grade so that knowledge, language, and skills build cumulatively from year to year. This sequential building of knowledge not only helps ensure that children enter each new grade ready to learn, it also helps prevent the repetitions and gaps that so often characterize current education. No more repeated units in multiple years on the rain forest, with little or no attention to the Bill of Rights, world geography, or exposure to other cultures. Core Knowledge sets high expectations for all children that are achievable thanks to the cumulative, sequential way that knowledge and skills build. Teachers in Core Knowledge schools have assurance that children will emerge well prepared with a shared body of knowledge and skills.

And,

A typical state or district curriculum says, "Students will demonstrate knowledge of people, events, ideas, and movements that contributed to the development of the United States." But which people and events? Which ideas and movements? The *Sequence* is distinguished by its specificity. By clearly specifying important knowledge in language arts, history, geography, math, science, and the fine arts, the *Sequence* presents a practical answer to the question, "What do our children need to know?" Teachers are free to devote their energies and efforts to creatively planning how to teach the content to the children in their classrooms.

In general, The Core Knowledge Sequence aligns with the Common Core State Standards. Woodrow Wilson Academy reserves the right to tweak the timelines in the Core Knowledge curriculum as we see fit, but the overall differences are not major.

How can we be sure the curricula at WWA are matching up with the Common Core State Standards?

Jackie Uttley, Instructional Coach at WWA, has done extensive research on the CCSS and how they align with the curriculum we use. She also organized and updated information compiled by the Core Knowledge Foundation and Shannon Harrington, her predecessor. This month, September 2nd through the 15th, she will be working closely with the teachers on professional development and curriculum-building, just to double-check things, but she's confident everything is being covered.

As mentioned previously, WWA has the leeway to alter the timelines slightly when using the Core Knowledge curriculum. Even if these timelines don't match the standards perfectly, because of the cyclical nature of the curriculum, our students will cover all the standards at regular intervals.

Mrs. Uttley was able to reiterate that by the time a WWA student goes from Kindergarten to 5th Grade, he or she has studied a topic two or three times.

What about the other curricula we use at WWA? Do those align with the Common Core State Standards?

The Saxon Math, Shurley Grammar, Write Source, Treasures Reading, and Handwriting Without Tears curricula we use were not created to comply to CCSS, however Woodrow Wilson Academy is making an effort to ensure all standards are being addressed.

We can't have a discussion about the Common Core State Standards and not talk about testing.

Because we are a public school, WWA is required by law to participate in state testing.

Standardized tests, by nature, are not unique to the student. They are not a true measurement of every single student, but they do provide valuable information about whether or not the students, as a whole, in general, are where they need to be.

Here is the testing schedule at WWA:

Name of the Test	What we're evaluating	Frequency	Grades
DIBLES	Reading Fluency	3 times a year	K - 3rd
CogAT	Gifted and Talented	October	2nd
DRA2	Reading Comprehension	End of the year	K - 3rd
CMAS/PARCC*	History, Science, Writing, Reading & Math	March - May	3rd - 8th
MAP**	Reading & Math	2 times a year	3rd - 8th
WWA Writing Assessment	Writing	3 times a year	K - 8th

*Starting in 3rd Grade, Reading, Writing, and Math are tested every year. Social Studies is tested in 4th (Colorado History) and 7th, and Science is tested in 5th and 8th.

**MAP stands for Measures of Academic Progress. It measures not only growth from fall to fall but also academic progress.

Information that may be challenging to glean from the testing results are from those students who started in a school other than WWA. The teachers do their best in helping those students catch up, but it's uncertain how that will affect their scores.

As a Board of Directors, what questions should we be prepared to answer? What questions could parents have? Here are some possible examples:

Question: Are we changing our curricula to fit Common Core?

Answer: The Common Core is not a curriculum. Core Knowledge is our chosen curriculum, and we will continue to use it.

Question: This is a charter school. Don't we have a waiver for this type of thing?

Answer: The CCSS are not federally mandated, however, they are state mandated standards, and we need to comply with those. How we do so is up to us. Our charter allows us to choose a curriculum that is different from what the Jefferson County Public School Board of Education suggests. At this time, there is no need for WWA to make any changes.

Question: Standards require testing, and our kids are already tested a lot. What will WWA do about that?

Answer: Because we are a public school, WWA is required by law to participate in state testing.

Question: How will our students do on the tests designed to measure Common Core State Standards?

Answer: The assessments will be based directly on the CCSS and will be performance based. They will focus on a variety of different things, including writing effectively while analyzing text, applying skills, concepts and understandings to solve multi-step problems, reading comprehension, conceptual understanding, and mathematical fluency. They will include a range of item types, including innovating constructed response, extended performance tasks, and selected response, all of which will be computer-based. We won't know how well our students will perform until they've had experience with taking the tests. As with any new set of assessments, it will take time to gather and analyze data.

Question: Has WWA ever made changes to the curriculum based on a standard?

Answer: Interestingly enough, we have. In the 4th Grade classes, WWA has always taught a unit on Colorado History. When the standards were released, we realized that although we were already teaching Colorado History, there was a gap between what we were teaching and what was being tested. We filled this need with a more robust unit on Colorado History. What should be learned from that? Standards are not something to fear. They are a guideline, and if we see a gap that needs filled, we have the flexibility to do that.

Conclusions

Where does the BOD stand on supporting the Common Core State Standards?

The BOD has the best interest of WWA students in mind. The Common Core State Standards exist as a guideline only. Our curriculum best fits the needs of our students, and it did so before the standards were in place, and it will continue to do so without the need to make drastic changes.

As a Board, I feel we can be confident that WWA is on the right track when it comes to aligning with the Common Core State Standards. No system is perfect, and time will tell how well our students do on the assessments. All of the pieces are there; it will just be a matter of how the tests translate into reality.

We are mindful of how well our students are doing, and we are confident that the curriculum works, but we are aware and flexible enough to see where needs are and to fill those gaps should they become evident.

WWA prides itself in excellence and high standards, regardless of state guidelines and the tests they require.

We need to recognize that we are fortunate to be in this position.

Resources:

Common Core Website

<http://www.corestandards.org/>

Core Knowledge Website

<http://www.coreknowledge.org/standards-alignments>

Saxon Website

<http://www.hmhco.com/shop/education-curriculum/math/saxon-math>

Treasures Reading Website

<http://www.macmillanmh.com/reading/>

Shurley Grammar Website

<https://www.shurley.com/>

Handwriting Without Tears Website

<http://www.hwtears.com/hwt/why-it-works/faqs>

The official citation for the CCSS:

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Core Knowledge (6-8) Alignment With Colorado Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

**By
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WWA Board of Directors**

After reviewing data put together by Jackie Utley titled *Correlation of the Core Knowledge Sequence and the Colorado Grade Level Expectations* and performing a detailed review of sources on the internet, I could not find any significant gaps in alignment between the WWA Core Knowledge Sequence and the Common Core State Standards in grades 6-8 (or any grade K-8).

When comparing both the alignment data prepared by Mrs. Utley that was specific to Colorado Grade Level expectations and comparing alignments provided by the Core Knowledge Foundation (www.coreknowledge.org), there were more instances of the core knowledge sequence aligning to standards at higher grade levels than at lower grades. Although this could provide its own challenges in standardized testing if the child covered the content several years prior, it is far better than not having covered the content at all. In most cases, there is direct alignment between the Core Knowledge Sequence and a corresponding set of standards or expectations for that grade level. It was also not uncommon to see the same standard covered by multiple years in the corresponding Core Knowledge Sequence.

It is important to realize that the Core Knowledge is a curriculum with specific content, while the Common Core State Standards are just standards. The standards set goals, but don't specify content for each grade level. It is also important to note that the founder of the Core Knowledge Sequence, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., has been quoted as supporting the Common Core State Standards. This indicates that the CCSS bring standards closer to the philosophies of core knowledge, including the definition of specific content that builds on content from previous years.

When I'm asked if I support the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) I give an emphatic "yes." They constitute the first multi-state plan to give substance and coherence to what is taught in the public schools. They encourage the systematic development of knowledge in K-5. They break the fearful silence about the critical importance of specific content in the early grades. They offer an example (the human body) of how knowledge ought to be built systematically across grades. - E.D. Hirsch, Jr. , founder of the Core Knowledge Foundation (Huffington Post 08/27/2013)

In summary, I feel that the analysis done by Mrs. Utley is very thorough and that any significant gaps have been identified and can be covered if it is deemed to be necessary by the teaching staff and administration.

**A message from WWA Principal,
Carole Bartusiak**

Core Knowledge and Common Core are not in direct conflict with each other. As an administrator, I am thrilled that Common Core is addressing a similar purpose for education, that all students deserve to have a structured, well thought out plan for instruction at every grade level. As a school, we will continue to follow the Core Knowledge curriculum. Yet, the standards addressed in Common Core will be covered as students navigate through their K-8 years at Woodrow Wilson Academy.