The Common Core State Standards Initiative:
A state-led effort to create shared high standards to make sure all American students are ready for college and work.

Today, we have different standards in every state and we need a common core of state standards to ensure all students, no matter where they live, are prepared for success in college and work. Building on the excellent foundation of standards states have laid, these standards are the first step in providing our young people with a high-quality education. It should be clear to every student, parent, and teacher what the standards of success are in every school.

Teachers, parents and community leaders have all weighed in to create the common core state standards. The draft K-12 Common Core State Standards are a breakthrough in focus and coherence. They allow students to understand what is expected of them and to become progressively more proficient in understanding and using English and Language Arts. At the same time, teachers will be better equipped to know exactly what they need to help students learn and establish individualized benchmarks for them. The common core draft standards focus on core conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades, thus enabling teachers to take the time needed to teach core concepts and procedures well -- and to give students the opportunity to really master them.

With students, parents and teachers all on the same page and working together for shared goals, we can ensure that students make progress each year and graduate from school prepared to succeed and build a strong future for themselves and the country.

Key Takeaways from the Draft K–12 Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts

Reading

- The standards establish a "staircase" of increasing complexity in what students must be able to read so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school. The standards also require the progressive development of reading comprehension so that students advancing through the grades are able to gain more from whatever they read.

- Through reading a diverse array of classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspective. Because the standards are building blocks for successful classrooms, but recognize that teachers, school districts and states need to decide on appropriate curriculum, they intentionally do not offer a reading list. Instead, they offer numerous sample texts to help teachers prepare for the school year and allow parents and students to know what to expect at the beginning of the year.

- The standards mandate certain critical types of content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and the writings of Shakespeare. The standards appropriately defer the many remaining decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, and schools.

Writing

- The ability to write logical arguments based on substantive claims, sound reasoning, and relevant evidence is a cornerstone of the writing standards, with opinion writing—a basic form of argument—extending down into the earliest grades.

- Research—both short, focused projects (such as those commonly required in the workplace) and longer term in depth research —is emphasized throughout the standards but most prominently in the writing strand since a written analysis and presentation of findings is so often critical.

- Annotated samples of student writing accompany the standards and help establish adequate performance levels in writing arguments, informational/explanatory texts, and narratives in the various grades.

Speaking and Listening

- The standards require that students gain, evaluate, and present increasingly complex information, ideas, and evidence through listening and speaking as well as through media.

- An important focus of the speaking and listening standards is academic discussion in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-class settings. Formal presentations are one important way such talk occurs, but so is the more informal discussion that takes place as students collaborate to answer questions, build understanding, and solve problems.

Language

- The standards expect that students will grow their vocabularies through a mix of conversations, direct instruction, and reading. The standards will help students determine word meanings, appreciate the nuances of words, and steadily expand their repertoire of words and phrases.

- The standards help prepare students for real life experience at college and in 21st century careers. The standards recognize that students must be able to use formal English in their writing and speaking but that they must also be able to make informed, skillful choices among the many ways to express themselves through language.

- Vocabulary and conventions are treated in their own strand not because skills in these areas should be handled in isolation but because their use extends across reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

Media and technology

- Just as media and technology are integrated in school and life in the twenty-first century, skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards.